

March 13, 2023

Senator Melissa Wiklund, Chair
Minnesota Senate Health and Human Services Committee

Chair Wiklund and members of the committee,

On behalf of the Minnesota Dental Association (MDA), I write to you pertaining to SF2800 and the composition of the Rural Health Advisory Committee (RHAC). The MDA believes the legislature's 2021 addition of a dentist to the committee should remain as a standalone position. However, in order to address the continued desire to modify the composition of the committee, **the MDA would support the addition of an allied dental professional** as a separate position. The perspective that allied dental professionals can bring to the RHAC would be valuable and would complement that of a dentist.

Background

Between 2015 and 2019, a dentist served on the RHAC under the position of "Licensed Health Care Professional." At the time there was no position designated for the dental profession. In 2018, an Oral Health Work Group was formed and published a report entitled "Strengthening the Oral Health System in Rural Minnesota."¹ The report made several recommendations, including adding a permanent membership position to RHAC for the oral health community.² The report cited a 2018 bill that would have added a permanent dentist position to the committee.³ That bill did not pass.

In 2021, legislation was finally enacted that added a permanent dentist membership position. Three dentists applied for the position; however, the position was not filled. In 2022, legislation was introduced that would have replaced the dentist position from RHAC with that of an "oral health professional."⁴ Although the bill did not pass, this language was removed from later versions.

In the fall of 2022, with the dentist position still vacant, the position was posted again. No reason was given why the position was previously not filled and subsequently re-posted. A dentist was not appointed to the position until February 3, 2023, nearly two years after the position was created.

¹ Strengthening the Oral Health System in Rural Minnesota, Office of Rural Health and Primary Care, Minnesota Department of Health, August 2018

² Strengthening the Oral Health System in Rural Minnesota, Office of Rural Health and Primary Care, Minnesota Department of Health, August 2018, p. 62

³ Ibid.

⁴ HF4112, 2022, 92nd Legislature, State of Minnesota

In March 2023, SF2800 was introduced with language permitting an oral health professional to serve “if a dentist is not available to participate.”⁵ The MDA questions why this language is necessary, especially given there were and are dentists ready to serve. Moreover, if the RHAC wishes to remain inclusive of other oral health voices, a position for allied dental professionals should be added.

Why a Dentist Seat Should Remain

The MDA believes the dentist seat should remain for the following reasons:

- Dentists are the leaders of the dental team. As doctors, the education and training dentists receive is unparalleled compared to other oral health professionals. Dentists are directly responsible for preventing, diagnosing, and treating oral diseases. Dentists also organize, oversee, and coordinate the efforts of the dental team including allied dental professionals.
- Dentists are often small business owners, aware of the economic realities and work force challenges facing rural Minnesota. Dentists are responsible for hiring staff, interacting with third party payers, and overall clinic operations.
- There is interest among dentists to serve. In 2021, three dentists applied to serve on RHAC. This is comparable to the number of applicants for the other positions on the committee.⁶
- Not including a dentist, but including another oral health professional, is inconsistent with the current membership. Minn. Stat. § 144.1481, subd.1, does not state that a “medical professional” or “nursing professional” will be considered should a doctor or nurse be unavailable. What is unique about dentists that warrants the proposed language in SF2800?

Why an Allied Dental Professional Seat Should Be Added

The Minnesota Dental Association supports all allied dental professionals. They are essential to dental practices and improving oral health of all Minnesotans. Allied dental professionals include dental therapists, dental hygienists, and dental assistants. If oral health is important to overall health as we all know it is, there should be greater representation of all professions within the oral health community. The current and proposed committee membership is already inclusive of other non-oral health related professions, so why isn't that the case with oral health?

⁵ HF1491, 2023, 93rd Legislature, State of Minnesota, Lines 1.20 – 1.21

⁶ There were two applicants for the Licensed Health Care Professional position in December 2022-January 2023, two applicants for the Registered Nurse position in late 2022-early 2023, and two applicants for the Volunteer Ambulance Service position in 2022.



Chair Wiklund and members of the committee, I ask that you support maintaining the dentist membership position on RHAC and consider adding a separate position for allied dental professionals to address any desire to modify the dentist position on the committee.

Should you have any questions, please contact the MDA's Government Affairs Manager Dan Murphy at dmurphy@mndental.org or 612-767-4255.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Carmelo Cinqueonce".

Carmelo Cinqueonce, MBA
Executive Director

The Minnesota Dental Association is a statewide professional membership organization representing Minnesota-licensed dentists and dental students, with a membership of over 3,000 dentists.