

Dear Senator Wiklund and committee members,

The Minnesota Dental Hygienists Association (MnDHA) supports legislative language that would add an “allied dental professional” to the Rural Health Advisory Committee. We believe strongly that the voices of dental hygienists and dental therapists are an important part of any discussion about access to care.

As currently constructed, the Rural Health Advisory Committee only includes one oral health professional in a 16-member committee while most members come from the medical community. The addition of a dental hygienist or dental therapist would add an important oral health perspective from a member of the dental team who provides services in rural communities, often to Minnesota’s public program recipients.

Dental hygienists are the preventive specialists of the dental team. What’s more, collaborative practice dental hygienists are essential as we seek to increase access to oral health care in rural communities, most of which have a shortage of dental professionals.

The inclusion of a dental hygienist on the Rural Health Advisory Committee would not be without precedent as dental hygienists have been members of the Dental Services Advisory Committee (DSAC), organized by the Department of Human Services, since DSAC’s inception. Further, dental hygienists were also represented on the Dental Homes Pilot Project Committee as it worked to identify parameters for creative models of oral health delivery in the future.

Overall health cannot be attained without oral health. It is essential to have a broad perspective of oral health in order to meet the challenges of delivery of services in rural communities. Please support the inclusion of an allied dental professional, particularly a dental hygienist, in the Rural Health Advisory Committee.

Respectfully,

Carol Dahlke, President

Minnesota Dental Hygienists Association