

March 14, 2023

The Honorable Liz Reyer, Representative
575 State Office Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

The Honorable Liz Boldon, Senator
95 University Ave. W.
Minnesota Senate Bldg. #3201
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Representative Reyer and Senator Boldon:

We write in support of your proposal to establish a critical access dental infrastructure program in Minnesota (HF1296/SF1008).

Founded in 1969, Delta Dental of Minnesota is a non-profit health service plan corporation administering dental benefits to over 2.5 million Minnesotans. Our company operates with a mission to promote healthier lives, and a vision to partner to advance health and community well-being by improving access, quality and innovation.

Access to appropriate oral health care is important to the overall health and wellbeing of Minnesotans. Optimal oral health starting in childhood and continuing in adulthood has been associated with decreased risk of cardiovascular disease, stroke, and other negative health outcomes. Improving the access and availability of dental care for all Minnesotans is in our shared public interest.

Critical access dental clinics play a pivotal role in providing access and availability of dental care to Minnesotans, especially those covered under the Medical Assistance and MinnesotaCare programs. Unfortunately, Minnesota is experiencing a shortage of dental providers, as well as provider hesitancy to fully participate in the public programs as currently implemented (see 2022 Department of Human Services report *Analysis of State Medicaid Dental Programs and Dental Provider Hesitancy*). According to the Minnesota Department of Health, 54 of Minnesota's 87 counties are currently designated as dental Health Provider Shortage Areas. The Board of Dentistry has cited concerns regarding shortages of dental assistants and dental hygienists in Minnesota as well.

Delta Dental of Minnesota Foundation—a separate nonprofit organization—has provided charitable funding to nonprofits that operate critical access dental clinics in Minnesota. The giving has supported these clinics by funding the expansion of dental teams, spaces, services, and equipment for increased access to care. However, significant additional need remains.

Supporting critical access dental clinics is one tool in the toolbox that the Legislature can use to assist in addressing the state's access challenges. HF1296/SF1008 would provide funding through grants and forgivable loans to eligible and appropriate critical access dental clinics in order to sustain and grow capacity to provide oral health services to underserved patients.

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Additionally, HF1296 as amended would provide additional funding for a dental workforce development program. Delta Dental of Minnesota supports both of these endeavors.

Given the ongoing needs in the community, we strongly support efforts by the State of Minnesota to support critical access dental clinics and address workforce shortages in our state. HF1296 (as amended) and SF1008 represent a step in the right direction in attempting to further address these needs.

We thank you for your leadership on this issue.

Sincerely,



Tamera Robinson
President Insurance Division

cc: Commissioner Cunningham, Department of Health
Senators Wiklund, Mann, Utke, Abeler, Hoffman, Kupec, Lieske and Morrison
Representatives Hassan, Liebling, Bierman, Schomacker, Acomb, Backer, Carroll,
Elkins, Hemmingsen-Jaeger, Her, Kiel, Murphy, Nadeau, Neu Brindley, Perryman,
Quam, Smith and Olson

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