

Minnesota Educators of Dental Assistants

Senator Bobby Joe Champion, Chair
Senate Jobs and Economic Development Committee
3401 Minnesota Senate Building
St. Paul, MN 55155

Dear Senator Champion and Members of the Senate Jobs and Economic Development Committee,

I am writing on behalf of the Minnesota Educators of Dental Assistants (MEDA) to express our strong support for SF1325, a bill that aims to provide essential funding for dental assisting and hygiene education programs across Minnesota. This bill is necessary to address the critical need for expanded capacity, updated infrastructure, and enhanced educational resources in our dental programs.

Why SF1325 is Necessary and Impactful:

The demand for dental professionals is growing, and our educational institutions must be equipped to meet this need. SF1325 will provide the necessary financial support to expand and improve our dental programs, ensuring that we can train more students and ultimately address the shortage of dental professionals in our state. The bill's funding will be used for various purposes, including clinical infrastructure expansion, equipment upgrades and faculty support.

Access to dental care is a critical issue, particularly in underserved communities. By expanding our dental programs, we can increase the number of trained professionals who are ready to serve these communities. This funding will help us enhance our facilities, allowing us to accommodate more students and provide them with the hands-on experience they need to succeed in their careers.

Moreover, the dental profession is facing a significant workforce shortage. Many dental practices are struggling to find qualified dental assistants and hygienists, which impacts the quality and availability of care for patients. By investing in our educational programs, we can help bridge this gap and ensure that more qualified professionals enter the workforce. This will not only improve access to care but also support the overall health and well-being of our communities.

Consequences of Waitlists:

Many of the programs have encountered waitlists for the past several years and are unable to increase enrollment due to current program infrastructure. The consequences of waitlists for dental programs are significant and multifaceted, impacting both students and the broader community. Waitlists limit the number of trained dental professionals entering the workforce, exacerbating the shortage of dental assistants and hygienists. This reduces access to dental care for patients, especially in underserved areas, and negatively impacts community health. Fewer dental professionals mean longer wait times for appointments and reduced availability of preventive and restorative dental services.

Data on Programs in Our Association:

Hennepin Technical College (HTC) located in Eden Prairie and Brooklyn Park offers Dental Assisting (DA) at both campuses and has proposed a Dental Hygiene (DH) program at the Brooklyn Park campus. Currently, the DA program enrolls 24 students per year at the Eden Prairie campus and 48 students per year at the Brooklyn Park campus. The DA program has a current waitlist of approximately one year with 60 students applying for 24 spots.

Dakota County Community and Technical College (DCTC) in Rosemount also stands to gain from SF1325. The DA program at DCTC enrolls 24 students per year and has a waiting list of approximately one year. DCTC plans to expand its program by increasing the number of dental chairs from 6 to 24 and establishing a dental hygiene program. This expansion requires over \$1 million in funding.

Minneapolis College, located in Minneapolis, needs \$2.1 million for infrastructural changes and additional equipment to advance, improve, and expand its DA program. The program currently enrolls 24 students per year and has no waiting list.

Northwest Technical College (NTC) in Bemidji has a capacity of 24 students per year but hasn't been at full capacity for several years. NTC needs \$100,000 for renovations, equipment, and marketing to increase awareness of its DA program.

Minnesota North College, Hibbing, has seen its enrollment more than double from 14 to 30 students in the past year. The college accepts up to 36 students per year and needs \$250,000 for clinic updates and equipment.

Century College in White Bear Lake offers both DA and DH programs. The DA program enrolls 24 students per year. Century College needs \$650,000 for clinic expansion to increase the number of dental chairs from 12 to 20 to accommodate the dental assisting and dental hygiene program.

Rochester Community and Technical College (RCTC) in Rochester is working on expanding its DA program. The program currently enrolls 24 students per year and aims to increase to 30 students after the completion of a simulation lab. RCTC needs \$50,000-100,000 for additional faculty salaries and \$20,000 for dental supplies.

Central Lakes College in Brainerd plans to apply for a grant to support its dental assisting and hygiene programs. The DA program currently enrolls 24 students per year and has a waiting list of 40 students. Central Lakes College needs \$1 million for a simulation lab.

South Central College in North Mankato shares clinic space with Minnesota State University, Mankato Dental Hygiene. The college accepts 24 students per year and has had a waiting list for the last five years. South Central College needs \$1.5 million to build its own dental clinic space.

Conclusion and Call to Action:

In conclusion, we urge you to support SF1325. This bill represents a vital investment in our community's health and well-being. By approving this funding, you will help us expand our capacity, improve our facilities, and provide essential services to those in need.

Thank you for your time and consideration. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or need further information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'TE' followed by a stylized flourish.

Tammy Erickson, LDA, CDA, BA

President

Minnesota Educators of Dental Assistants

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