



Governor's Advisory Council for Exceptional Citizens (GACEC)
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MEMORANDUM

DATE: January 26, 2016

TO: The Honorable Members of the Delaware General Assembly

FROM: Robert D. Overmiller, Chairperson
GACEC

RE: **Senate Bill No. 142 (Medicaid Coverage of Adult Dental Services)**

The Governor's Advisory Council for Exceptional Citizens (GACEC) has reviewed **Senate Bill No. 142** which would expand the Delaware Public Assistance Code to provide preventative and urgent dental care to all eligible Medicaid recipients. Council **endorses** the proposed legislation and would like to share the following observations.

Research on dental health suggests that poor oral health is linked to increased risks for chronic health conditions such as heart disease and diabetes. Dental disease is not benign; it can be life-threatening. See attached article, "Dental problems - sometimes deadly - drive more people to ER" (July 11, 2015). This problem is even more pronounced among individuals with disabilities because of their extremely limited access to dental care. A survey conducted on the health status of individuals with disabilities in Delaware showed that almost a quarter (24.3%) of adults surveyed did not receive regular dental care. Adults who depend on state health insurance do not have dental care coverage through Medicaid

While many of us have some anxiety, financial difficulty or other challenge associated with our access to dental care, individuals with disabilities often face multiple difficulties. Recent studies have shown that the knowledge one has of dental care is a major predictor of dental health. Patients with cognitive disabilities are often dependent on others for assistance, whether for transportation, home care activities, decision-making about treatment and/or payment. Physical disabilities can limit the ability of the patient to practice effective dental hygiene and access adequate care in a dental office. While Delaware offers a good Medicaid program to meet the needs of children who qualify, virtually no financial assistance is available for adults with unmet dental needs.

The lack of state funding for adults with disabilities is a major impediment to dental care and poor dental health is known to be a factor in a wide range of non-dental medical conditions. This bill is designed as "enabling legislation". It would only be effective upon an appropriation. In its

November 19, 2015 FY17 budget presentation, the Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) recommended the inclusion of 6-month funding (approximately 2.4 million) to implement the adult dental benefit initiative. The GACEC supports such funding. It is consistent with a trend among the states to incrementally add an adult dental benefit to Medicaid state plans. See attached excerpt from National Academy for State Health Policy, “Adult Dental Benefits in Medicaid: Recent Experiences from Seven States” (July, 2015).

Thank you for your time and consideration of our observations. Please feel free to contact me or Wendy Strauss should you have any questions.

Enclosures