



COMMISSION ON AGING

March 13, 2017

The Honorable Michael McKay  
322 House Office Building  
6 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Dear Delegate McKay,

I am writing on behalf of the Montgomery County Commission on Aging in support of HBI158, which permits the Maryland Medical Assistance Program, beginning January 1, 2019, to provide comprehensive dental services for adults whose annual household income is at or below 133% of the poverty level. Oral health and general health are interwoven. Disparities in oral health care exist for underserved and vulnerable older adults. The Commission recognizes the value of oral health for older adults and believes that this bill has the potential to provide needed oral healthcare to Maryland's most vulnerable populations.

In September 2016, the Commission published the findings of a summer study examining the state of oral health care for older adults in Montgomery County. Among the challenges facing seniors revealed by the study are:

- The majority of older adults lack dental insurance, and many do not see the need to go to a dentist.
- Many older adults cannot brush their teeth independently, and/or they forget to brush their teeth.
- As adults age, teeth become less sensitive to pain, potentially leading to a delay in care and more advanced disease. In addition, older adults often take medications that mask pain.
- The majority of persons who develop mouth cancers are seniors. Mouth cancer usually has no or minimal symptoms.
- Wait times and neglect can lead to oral caries that require specialized treatment, e.g. root canals, which many older adults cannot afford. In addition, there is limited funding and infrastructure available to provide dentures and replacement teeth.
- There is a disconnect between medical care and dental care in both the safety-net and regular health care system.
- Nursing facilities require that residents receive only one oral health check per year. Assisted living facilities have no oral health care requirements.
- Neither Medicare nor Medicaid provide dental coverage for adults.

**Department of Health and Human Services**

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[www.montgomerycountymd.gov/hhs](http://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/hhs)

These findings point to the need for providing access to oral health for low-income adults, including vulnerable seniors. For these reasons, we support HB 1158 and urge that oral health be part of the Maryland Medical Assistance Program. I have attached the Commission's Summer Study for your review.

Noelle Heyman, Chair  
Montgomery County Commission on Aging

Enclosure: COA Summer Study on Oral Care Summer 2016

cc: Jay Kenney  
Leslie Frey