



AMERICAN
DENTAL
EDUCATION
ASSOCIATION

BT

April 11, 2007

The Honorable John D. Dingell
Chair
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Dingell:

The undersigned deans of U.S. dental schools strongly endorse the *Children's Dental Health Improvement Act of 2007* (H.R. 1781). We applaud your sustained leadership in addressing access to oral health care for our nation's vulnerable children.

Encouraging states to improve dental care within their Medicaid and SCHIP programs, as your proposal does, would increase access to oral health care for children presently outside a system of care. Likewise, incentives to states for demonstration projects that foster innovative programs expanding access to oral health services and improving dental care for low-income children are desperately needed. Such incentives would help to ensure that those at greatest risk are receiving the oral health care they need.

Despite Medicaid and State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP), dental care remains an underutilized health service for low-income children. According to *Oral Health in America: A Report of the Surgeon General* in 2000, approximately 23 million children have no dental coverage. For every child less than 18 years of age without medical insurance, there are three without dental insurance. Less than a third of poor children receive any dental care at all.

Tooth decay remains the most common chronic disease of US children. Oral disease affects individuals, families, the community and society. Poor oral health can lead to pain and infection, missed school and disruptions of vital functions such as speech and eating, and other productive activities. More than 51 million school hours are lost to dental related illness.

The nation's academic dental institutions which serve as safety net providers for thousands of underserved children pledge to work with you to address the oral health needs of this vulnerable population.

Sincerely,

Dr. Charles N. Bertolami
Dean, University of California, San Francisco School of Dentistry

The mission of the American Dental Education Association is to lead individuals and institutions of the dental education community to address contemporary issues influencing education, research, and the delivery of oral health care for the improvement of the health of the public.

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