

# SUPPORT HB 1173 AND SB 1254 - DENTAL THERAPY

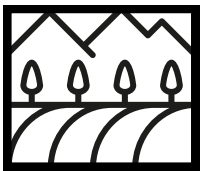
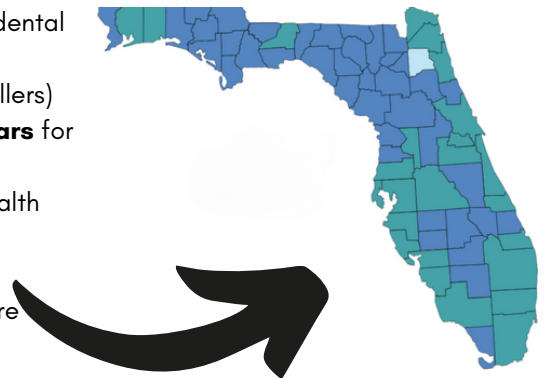
*Healthy Smiles for All Floridians*

Sponsors: Representative Linda Chaney and Senator Jay Collins

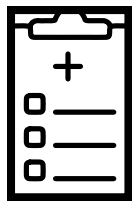
Florida has an opportunity to expand access to dental care and improve the health of Floridians. Oral health is intricately linked to overall physical health, mental well-being, and school performance. Despite profound and persistent dental professional shortages and high out-of-pocket costs, Florida's law related to the practice of dentistry hasn't been substantially updated to improve access for over 10 years. Millions of Floridians live in pain and miss work or school because they can't find or afford dental care in their communities. This problem exists along all Florida geographic areas, racial and ethnic lines, and income levels.

## ACCESS AND AFFORDABILITY PROBLEMS

- **120,000 Floridians visited hospital emergency rooms** in 2021 for **preventable** dental conditions due to lack of affordable dental care in their communities
- Hospitals provided temporary relief for these conditions (only antibiotics and painkillers) and charged patients, insurers, and the Medicaid program **over a half billion dollars** for those services.
- **Florida ranks last in the U.S.** for the percentage of children who had a dental health visit in the last 12 months
- The U.S. Department of Health and Human Service (HHS) has designated **66 of 67 Florida counties as "dental health professional shortage areas."** Floridians are forced to travel long distances to find care or go without care.



Adults in rural areas have almost twice the frequency of tooth loss vs urban adults.



Only 18% of Florida dentists served any Medicaid-enrolled patients in 2021.



Poor oral health is linked to health conditions - diabetes, high blood pressure, pre-term births, and more.



One in four Florida 3rd graders have untreated cavities, making Florida the 6th worst state in the nation for this measure.

## WHAT WILL HB 1173 & SB 1254 ACCOMPLISH?

- Expand access to oral health services by expanding dental teams by allowing the licensure of dental therapists
- 
- Ensure that Florida-licensed dental therapists practice under the supervision of a dentist
- 
- Allow Medicaid to reimburse dental services provided by a mobile dental unit working with health access settings that care for underserved populations.

# WHO ARE DENTAL THERAPISTS?

They are mid-level oral health providers, similar to a physician's assistant for medical care, who are hired and supervised by dentists. Dentists choose to hire dental therapists for their practice, enabling the practice to serve more patients and provide treatment in community settings.

Dental therapists receive rigorous training in a select set of routine procedures such as filling cavities, placing temporary crowns, and extracting badly diseased or loose teeth. Under the Commission on Dental Accreditation's (CODA) national dental therapy accreditation standards, students must complete at least three academic years of full-time instruction, which includes clinical experience.

# WHERE WILL DENTAL THERAPISTS PRACTICE?

Florida-licensed dental therapists will provide services in public and private settings that are determined solely by their supervising dentist:

- Programs or institutions of the Department of Children and Families (DCF), the Department of Health (DOH), the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ)
- Nonprofit community health centers
- Head Start programs
- Federally qualified health centers or similar settings
- School-based prevention programs
- Clinics operated by accredited dentistry and dental hygiene colleges



11 STATES

## A Proven Solution

11 states and 2 tribal authorities have already authorized dental therapists to expand access to dental care. Dental therapists have practiced in the United States for about 20 years and all literature proves its safety and effectiveness.

## Dental Therapists:

RECEIVE EXTENSIVE EDUCATION AND TRAINING TO PROVIDE SAFE, QUALITY CARE

GRADUATE FROM A CODA-ACCREDITED DENTAL THERAPY SCHOOL

COMPLETE A DENTAL THERAPY LICENSURE CLINICAL EXAM BY THE AMERICAN BOARD OF DENTAL EXAMINERS (ADEX)

ENTER THE WORKFORCE WITH LESS SCHOOL DEBT MAKING THEM LESS COSTLY TO ONBOARD THAN DENTISTS.

**Q:** With less schooling than a dentist, is it safe for dental therapists to perform “irreversible surgical procedures”?

**A:** Yes! Dental therapists are educated and trained to the same standard as dentists on the smaller number of procedures they perform. In January 2013 the ADA's Council on Scientific Affairs conducted a systematic review of oral health outcomes produced by dental teams incorporating dental therapists, finding “the results of a variety of studies indicate that appropriately trained midlevel providers are capable of providing high-quality services, including irreversible procedures such as restorative care and dental extractions.” Dental therapists are licensed in 50 other countries and 11 states and 2 tribal authorities in the U.S.