

October 11 2022

The Honorable Ben Ray Lujan
U.S. Senate
498 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins
U.S. Senate
413 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Ben Cardin
U.S. Senate
509 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senators Lujan, Collins, and Cardin:

On behalf of the members of our collective organizations, we write to express our support for your legislation, the *Oral Health Literacy and Awareness Act of 2022*. Your bipartisan bill would authorize the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) to establish an evidence-based education campaign to promote oral health literacy (OHL) among the at-risk populations served by HRSA programs.

Dentists continue to observe, and research documents, significant disparities in dental care and the progression of preventable tooth decay and disease by race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. On average, over 34 million school hours and more than \$45 billion in productivity is lost annually due to untreated dental disease and dental emergencies requiring unplanned care.¹ The oral healthcare system remains underutilized, with only 46.2% of Americans visiting a dentist in 2018.²

OHL, defined as the individual capacity to understand and use health information to transform oral health behaviors, is key to increasing utilization of the oral health care system and improving health outcomes.³ Most oral health ailments, including tooth decay, periodontal disease, and certain oral cancers, can be prevented by promoting OHL among all populations, with an emphasis on children to ensure they develop and maintain healthy habits into adulthood.

The *Oral Health Literacy and Awareness Act of 2022* would authorize HRSA to receive \$750,000 per annum for fiscal years 2023 through 2027 to establish an OHL education campaign that communicates directly with many of the populations most impacted by poor oral health. Increasing OHL among the at-risk populations served by HRSA will help prevent the development of serious disease, mitigate high-cost emergency care, and encourage greater use of the oral healthcare system.

Last year, a companion bill to your legislation, H.R.4555, passed the House of Representatives by a 369-58 vote with significant bipartisan support. We urge the Senate to act swiftly to pass your legislation during the 117th Congress, so HRSA may receive the dedicated funding necessary to establish an effective education campaign that addresses these oral health issues.

¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2021, January 25). *Oral Health Fast Facts*. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. <https://www.cdc.gov/oralhealth/fast-facts/index.html>

² Increase Use of the Oral Health Care System - Data - *Healthy People 2030*, <https://health.gov/healthypeople/objectives-and-data/browse-objectives/health-care/increase-use-oral-health-care-system-oh-08/data>.

³ Baskaradoss JK. Relationship between oral health literacy and oral health status. *BMC Oral Health*. 2018 Oct 24;18(1):172. doi: 10.1186/s12903-018-0640-1. PMID: 30355347; PMCID: PMC6201552.

As dentists, we believe OHL is the foundation to a lifetime of wellness and disease prevention. The dental community is proud to endorse the *Oral Health Literacy and Awareness Act of 2022*. Through the promotion of OHL, all Americans can attain greater health knowledge and improve health outcomes.

Sincerely,

Academy of General Dentistry
American Academy of Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology
American Academy of Oral and Maxillofacial Radiology
American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry
American Academy of Periodontology
American Association for Dental, Oral, and Craniofacial Research
American Association of Endodontists
American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons
American Association of Orthodontists
American College of Prosthodontists
American Dental Association
American Dental Education Association
American Society of Dentist Anesthesiologists
American Student Dental Association
Diverse Dental Society
Hispanic Dental Association
National Dental Association
Society of American Indian Dentists
The Children's Oral Health Institute