

June 15, 2020

The Honorable Rosa DeLauro
Chairwoman
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education
and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Tom Cole
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education
and Related Agencies
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Roy Blunt
Chairman
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education
and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Appropriations Subcommittee on Labor,
Health and Human Services, Education
and Related Agencies
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman DeLauro, Chairman Blunt, and Ranking Members Cole and Murray:

On behalf of the Academy of General Dentistry (AGD) and its 39,000 members, I write to respectfully urge you to continue the investment in our nation's health by continuing to fund critical dental workforce and oral health-related programs.

HRSA Oral Health Training Programs – The AGD is requesting the Subcommittees to provide FY 2021 funding for the HRSA Title VII Primary Care Dental Training Cluster and related oral health programs, with not less than \$12 million for the General Dentistry Residency program.

Further, we ask that the Subcommittee provide not less than \$3,000,000 for the Dental Faculty Loan Repayment program and to direct HRSA to provide continuation funding for grants initially awarded in fiscal years 2016 – 2020, and to initiate new awards for programs in general dentistry for faculty supervising dental students and residents.

A General Dentistry Residency program is an intensive postgraduate training program designed to train the general dentist in the management of medically complex and special-needs patients in both outpatient and hospital settings while increasing knowledge in the practice of dentistry and its various disciplines. Approximately 50% of dentists that enroll in advanced dental education programs choose to pursue a program within General Dentistry¹.

A critical factor in recruiting and retaining dental school faculty is helping them reduce their student loan debt. The average educational debt for all indebted dental school graduates in

¹American Dental Education Association, First-Year Enrollment in Advanced Dental Education Programs, 2010-12, Table, (https://www.adea.org/uploadedFiles/ADEA/Content_Conversion/publications/TrendsInDentalEducation2009/TDEStudents/Documents/Graduates_Postdoctoral_files/FirstYearEnrollmentInAdvancedPrograms.pdf)

the Class of 2019 was \$292,169, according to a survey by the American Dental Education Association (ADEA)². Academic positions typically pay only one-third of what graduates can earn upon entering private practice. Additionally, ADEA reported that there were approximately 342 dental faculty vacancies in the 2015-16 academic year, with the General Dentistry having the largest share of faculty vacancies among the various disciplines³.

Oral Health Literacy – The AGD also asks the Subcommittee to include report language providing funding from Program Management for the continued development of an oral health awareness and education campaign across relevant HRSA divisions. The FY 2020 appropriations for HRSA provided \$300,000 from Program Management for HRSA to continue the development of an oral health literacy campaign. The proposed language ensures that HRSA’s oral health literacy efforts will continue.

HRSA Chief Dental Officer – The AGD continues to support the importance of the position of Chief Dental Officer at HRSA to ensure HRSA’s oral health programs operate with maximum impact and efficiency under the leadership of a Chief Dental Officer with executive-level authority and resources to oversee and lead HRSA oral health programs and initiatives.

CMS Chief Dental Officer – AGD requests that the Committee express concern that the Chief Dental Officer position within the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services remains vacant, and encourage CMS to fill this position. Medicaid’s Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT) Program and the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) both require dental services be provided for children, and a licensed dentist must be involved in managing and monitoring these programs to ensure oral health care is accessible and being delivered effectively.

Attached is proposed report language for your consideration.

The AGD thanks the Subcommittee for its consideration and encourages you to contact Daniel J. Buksa, JD, Associate Executive Director, Public Affairs, by phone at (312) 440-4328 or via email at Daniel.buksa@agd.org should you have any questions concerning our requests or if you would like to meet to discuss these important programs.

Thank you again for your ongoing support of and commitment to improving oral health for all Americans.

Sincerely,



Connie White, D.D.S., FAGD
President
Academy of General Dentistry



Myron (Mike) Bromberg, D.D.S.
Congressional Liaison
Academy of General Dentistry

² ADEA Survey of Dental School Seniors, 2019 Graduating Class Tables Report, Table 22, March 2020
(<https://www.adea.org/data/seniors/>)

³ American Dental Education Association, Primary Discipline of Vacant Positions, 2011-12 to 2015-16, Table,
(<https://www.adea.org/data/faculty/>)

Proposed Language:

- **HRSA, Oral Health Training Programs, Title VII – Dental Workforce**
Within the funds provided, the Committee includes not less than \$12,000,000 for General Dentistry Programs and not less than \$12,000,000 for Pediatric Dentistry Programs. The Committee directs HRSA to provide continuation funding for predoctoral and postdoctoral training grants initially awarded in fiscal year 2015, and for section 748 Dental Faculty Loan Program (DFLRP) grants initially awarded in fiscal years 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, and 2020.
- **HRSA – Program Management**
Oral Health Literacy. The Committee includes \$500,000 to continue the development of an oral health awareness and education campaign across relevant HRSA divisions, including the Health Centers Program, Oral Health Workforce, Maternal and Child Health, Ryan White HIV/ AIDS Program, and Rural Health. The Committee directs HRSA to identify oral health literacy strategies that are evidence-based and focused on oral healthcare prevention and education, including prevention of oral disease such as early childhood and other caries, periodontal disease, and oral cancer. The conferees expect the Chief Dental Officer to play a key role in the design, monitoring, oversight, and implementation of this project.
- **HRSA – Chief Dental Officer**
The Committee is pleased that HRSA has restored the position of Chief Dental Officer (CDO) and looks forward to learning how the agency has ensured that the CDO is functioning at an executive level authority with resources to oversee and lead HRSA oral health programs and initiatives. The Committee requests an update in the fiscal year 2021 Congressional Budget Justification request on how the CDO is serving as the agency representative on oral health issues to international, national, State or local government agencies, universities, and oral health stakeholder organizations.
- **CMS – Chief Dental Officer**
The Committee is concerned that the Chief Dental Officer position at CMS has been vacant since October 2017. Without a dentist to oversee oral health issues in Medicare and Medicaid, this vacancy leaves a significant gap of clinical oral health expertise within CMS. Medicaid provides oral health services to millions of children, pregnant women, and adults across the country. The Early Periodic Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment program requires dental services to be provided to beneficiaries eligible for the program. The Children’s Health Insurance Program also requires dental services as part of the benefit package available to children. A licensed dentist clinician is an invaluable resource to these programs and the agency’s strategy to expand access to oral health care. The Committee urges CMS to move forward with filling this vacancy.