

April 22, 2022

The Honorable Patty Murray
Chair
Committee on Health, Education, Labor &
Pensions
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor &
Pensions
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bernie Sanders
Chair
Subcommittee on Primary Health & Retirement
Security
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Primary Health & Retirement
Security
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Murray, Chair Sanders, Ranking Member Burr, and Ranking Member Collins,

On behalf of the members of our collective organizations, we urge the Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions (HELP) Committee to consider H.R.4555, the *Oral Health Literacy and Awareness Act*. This bipartisan bill would authorize the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) to implement an evidence-based education campaign to promote oral health literacy among vulnerable populations over a five-year period. Last year, H.R.4555 overwhelmingly passed the House of Representatives by a 369-58 vote and was subsequently referred to the Senate HELP Committee.

As dentists, we believe oral health literacy is the foundation of a lifetime of wellness. Most oral health ailments can be prevented through the promotion of oral health literacy, with an emphasis on children to ensure they develop and maintain healthy habits into adulthood. Oral health literacy serves as a cornerstone to improving the utilization of health care services and health outcomes among the underserved.

HRSA has already demonstrated a commitment to improving oral health among vulnerable populations. Through prior appropriations legislation, HRSA received funding to develop the oral health literacy education campaign. Enacting H.R.4555 would allow HRSA to move forward with implementation by authorizing \$750,000 per annum for fiscal years 2022 through 2026.

Troubling findings from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) helps to shed a light on the status of our nation's oral health. We failed to hit the Healthy People 2020 target of getting 49% of Americans to use the oral health care system. In 2016, only 43.3% of children, adolescents, and adults visited the dentist, less than the baseline target set in 2007 (44.5%). We should not endure another decade of backsliding.

Dentists continue to observe, and research documents, appalling disparities in dental care and the progression of preventable tooth decay and disease by race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and education. Through the promotion of oral health literacy, all Americans can attain greater health knowledge and improve health outcomes.

The dental community is proud to endorse H.R.4555 and advocate for the promotion of oral health literacy. If you have any questions about H.R.4555, please contact Pat O'Connor at (703) 351-6222 or patoconnor@kentoconnor.com.

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

CC: Senate HELP Committee members