

# NEWS RELEASE

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## Diverse coalition calls for expanded dental workforce in Vermont

**Montpelier, VT** – A broad coalition of lawmakers and advocacy organizations have joined together at the State House to voice their support for legislation that would expand Vermont's dental workforce. S.20 and H.1 would allow Licensed Dental Practitioners to provide dental services in the state of Vermont and address dental access issues faced by Vermonters. Licensed Dental Practitioners are a tool to improve access to dental care and bolster economic opportunities in communities across Vermont.

**Senator Michael Sirotkin** commented on the bills saying "I have represented Vermont seniors on Medicare and Medicaid for 3 decades in the State House. The dentists have continuously and consistently said they could not afford to take new Medicaid patients at the rate Vermont pays. S. 20 seems to be an elegant and Vermont-specific solution to the access problem our seniors face for the primary and preventative dental care so essential to their good health. In time I think the dental community will appreciate this change, just like doctors have come to find nurse practitioners and physician assistants invaluable to their work and patients."

"As the Executive Director of a clinic for the uninsured and underinsured, access to oral health is the single largest problem facing our patients," said **Peter Youngbaer** the Executive Director of the People's Health and wellness clinic in Barre. "For those with Medicaid, it's virtually impossible to find a dentist willing to take a patient. This is the large gap in capacity of our current Vermont oral health system and workforce. Adding Licensed Dental Practitioners to the oral health team would be the single largest step Vermont could take to providing access to quality oral health care for all Vermonters."

"Dental Practitioners are an innovative tool to improve access to dental care that just makes sense for Vermont," said VPIRG Consumer Protection Advocate **Falko Schilling**. "These providers already offer first class care around the world, and they are a needed solution to expand our state's ageing dental workforce"

Dental Hygienist **Sam Petrone** also spoke in favor of adding the new provider to Vermont's workforce. "Dental Practitioners will improve access to affordable, quality oral health care that is becoming unavailable to Vermonters due to an aging population of dentists and because of limitations that are currently placed on the traditional, licensed dental hygienist. The current delivery of oral health care is not working. This is an ongoing crisis within VT and nationally since before the time I became a hygienist almost 20 years ago. We cannot wait any longer to implement this provider."

**Sheila Banister**, an Associate Professor at the Vermont Technical College School of Dental Hygiene, discussed the need for improved dental access she sees every day, "Just yesterday we treated a 23 year old patient who had already lost seven teeth to decay, is well on his way to

losing several more, and cannot find a dental home that will accept his insurance. This is not an anomaly; we see these cases every day in our clinic and, for many of those who come to us for help, there is no place to refer these patients. Adding the Licensed Dental Practitioner to the dental team will increase access to care, prevent disease, create jobs and save taxpayers money.”

S.20 is currently being reviewed by the Senate Health and Welfare Committee, and H.1 is being reviewed by the House Committee on Government Operations. The Senate Health and Welfare Committee will be taking testimony on the bill Thursday February 4<sup>th</sup>.

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