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NEWS RELEASE

Legislation introduced in Ohio General Assembly to help address Ohio’s #1 unmet health need – dental care.

COLUMBUS, Ohio – State Rep. Ross McGregor (R-Springfield) today introduced legislation that will increase access to dental care throughout the state – specifically in areas designated as “Dental Health Professional Shortage Areas.”

“The Ohio Department of Health has stated that dental care is the number-one unmet health care need in the state, and oral health means more than just healthy teeth,” said Ohio Dental Association (ODA) Executive Director David Owsiany. “As any health care provider will tell you, oral disease is associated with a number of overall health problems – from cardiovascular disease to diabetes complications. It is imperative that Ohio address the problem of access to dental care to ensure a healthy Ohio.”

House Bill 131, the *McGregor Dental Access Bill*, will help ensure that Ohio’s elderly, disabled, working poor and children have access to dental care by providing communities and dentists with equipment and resources to meet the needs of Ohio’s most vulnerable populations. The bill has six key provisions:

1. Provides funding for local health departments to purchase portable dental units. These units will allow dentists and other dental professionals to reach out into nursing homes, senior centers, schools, clinics and other community centers to provide on-site dental care for underserved populations.
2. Makes available no-interest loans for the purchase of dental equipment for use in clinics, hospitals, dental offices and other facilities located in state-designated dental professional shortage areas.

3. Expands the Dentist Loan Repayment Program, which provides student loan repayment assistance for dentists who agree to practice in dental health professional shortage areas. Currently, the program is funded by a surcharge on dentists' licenses.
4. Provides funding for geriatric outreach programs operated by the OSU College of Dentistry and Case School of Dental Medicine.
5. Makes grants available through the Ohio Department of Health for the creation or expansion of accredited dental residency programs that provide dental services to underserved populations.
6. Expands the locations where dental hygienists may practice under the relaxed supervision of a dentist to include nursing homes, public/private clinics, mobile dental units, Headstart programs/facilities, patient homes and other locations as approved by the Ohio State Dental Board.

The ODA estimates that thousands of additional Ohioans, including geriatric and indigent populations, will be served through these programs. However, a critical component to ensuring the success of this additional access-to-care programming is maintaining fully funded adult dental Medicaid benefits, as proposed by Governor Strickland in his executive state budget for 2008-2009.

“Dental Medicaid funding for both children and adults is critical for Ohioans and a crucial factor in ensuring that providers and clinics located in lower-income communities across the state continue to operate and provide cost-effective dental care for those who need it,” said Owsiany. “The Medicaid dental program is an efficient, effective use of state dollars, and the McGregor Dental Access Bill will work in tandem with the Medicaid funding to help address Ohio’s number-one unmet health care need.”

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