

Ways and Means Committee – February 3, 2016

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1. Good morning. Chairperson Ancel and Committee members, I would like to thank you all for the opportunity to address this Committee today. My name is Vaughn Collins and I am the Executive Director of the Vermont State Dental Society, a position that I have held for the past three years. Prior to that I worked in the nonprofit and government sectors for over 25 years, including a stint managing one of Governor Dean's statewide Councils.
2. The Vermont State Dental Society represents over 85% of the licensed dentists that practice in Vermont. The VSDS is also an affiliate member of the American Dental Association.
3. Vermont dentists are first and foremost members of the healthcare delivery system, and are responsible for the oral health of Vermonters.

Vermont dentists contribute every day to Vermont's healthcare safe net. Last year the state of Vermont spent over \$25,000,000 on Medicaid dental reimbursements. The average reimbursement for a dental procedure is about 50% of what a dentist would normally charge a patient, who pays out of pocket. Therefore using simple math, if dentists are paid by Medicaid about ½ of what they normally would charge a private pay patient.....then last year Vermont dentists contributed about \$25,000,000 in "uncompensated dental care" to the oral health safety net system in Vermont. That is some serious "skin in the game", and not unlike what our medical colleagues contribute in their respective practices.

Finally Vermont dentists are small businesses. They have made significant investments in their respective communities (sometimes well over \$1,000,000), they employ Vermonters at higher than average wages, they provide good benefits, and they reinvest in their communities through supporting other small

businesses like landscapers, painters, cleaners, and insurance agents, just to name a few. The economic benefits of a dental office in your communities are wide spread and far reaching.

4. The Vermont State Dental Society strongly opposes Governor Shumlin's Provider Tax proposal. Many of the issues raised by the Vermont Medical Society's witnesses this morning are also true for dentists, but now you will hear from three VSDS dentists who will further outline our concerns, and state the reasons that we think the provider tax proposal is a public policy choice that is not fair, will not work, and in fact may reduce access to dental care.

The next three witnesses come from diverse practices. They all see Medicaid patients, but they all bring a different perspective to the table. First you will hear from Dr. Laurie Forest who practices here in Montpelier, and has a particularly large percentage of her patients covered by Medicaid. Next you will hear from Dr. Tom Connolly, an oral surgeon from South Burlington, and someone who can give you the perspective of a dental specialist and as the father of a dentist and a doctor. And finally you will hear from Dr. Grace Dickenson Branon, who practices in St. Albans, and is the current President of the Vermont State Dental Society.

5. Before I conclude my testimony I want to share a petition with this committee. This petition was signed by over 13,000 Vermonters from all over the state. The petition was circulated five years ago when Governor Shumlin first proposed his provider tax on dentists, but the issue is the same today, so I would respectfully suggest that this petition is still valid. Regardless, the community dentists of the Vermont State Dental Society will be sharing a new version of this petition with their patients starting this week, so I will be reporting back to the legislature with how many Vermonters sign on, this time around.
6. At this point I would like to turn the remainder of my time over to the three dedicated Vermont dentists that I mentioned earlier. Thank you for your time, the opportunity to address this Committee, and for your service to Vermont.