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Agency of Human Services

MEMORANDUM

To: Senator Ashe, Chair, Committee on Finance
From: Steven M. Costantino, Commissioner, Department of Vermont Health Access
Cc: Hal Cohen, Secretary, Agency of Human Services
Date: March 23, 2015
Re: S.20, An act relating to establishing and regulating licensed dental practitioners.

The Department of Vermont Health Access (DVHA) supports S.20, an act relating to establishing and regulating licensed dental practitioners.

Medicaid Coverage of Licensed Dental Practitioners:

The addition of licensed dental practitioners as new dental providers would help to address the serious and persistent issues of access to dental care for Vermont Medicaid beneficiaries. The current access concerns related to dental care are due to a variety of factors, including the inadequate distribution of dentists in the state, compounded by dentists who, due to low Medicaid rates and frequent appointment no-shows, will not accept Medicaid patients, only accept limited numbers of Medicaid patients, or only accept Medicaid patients in certain age ranges. While the State has successfully provided incentives for dentists to work and live in underserved areas through scholarships and loan repayment, there are still many geographically underserved populations around Vermont.

Following the establishment and regulation of licensed dental practitioners, Medicaid will cover services provided within their scope of practice. Services provided by licensed dental practitioners will be reimbursed at the current rate on file for services rendered by a dentist. S.20 as written does not necessitate DVHA to submit a State Plan Amendment (SPA) to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), as licensed dental practitioners would practice and be reimbursed under a dentist.

Fiscal Impact of Medicaid Coverage:

An increase in dental utilization is expected, as more Medicaid beneficiaries would have access to dental care. There is a potential to offset increased cost due to utilization through the reduction of over \$2.5 million spent annually on dental treatments in hospitals by increasing access to early preventive care.

As licensed dental practitioners do not current exist in Vermont, any fiscal impact would result only following the training and licensing of this provider type, a process that is expected to take a minimum of two years.

Licensed Dental Practitioner Coverage through Vermont Health Connect:

Delta Dental provided testimony on February 11th to the Senate Committee on Health and Welfare, stating that their plans would cover services performed by licensed dental practitioners. Vermont Health Connect will continue to offer Delta Dental plans on the exchange.