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To: Senate Committee on Health and Welfare

Re: H.206 – An act related to miscellaneous changes affecting the duties of the Department of Vermont Health Access.

From: The Office of the Health Care Advocate

Date: April 21st, 2023

Dear Chair Lyons and Members of the Senate Health and Welfare Committee on Health Care:

The Office of the Health Care Advocate (HCA) testified in broad support for section 1 of H.206 relating to Medicaid coverage for adult dental services. From our perspective, access to dental services continues to be one of the more pressing challenges for Vermonters on Medicaid in need of care. The details in this section, coupled with the provider rate increase in this year's budget represents a real attempt to improve access.

We are supportive of the elimination of the Medicaid dental cap for individuals in the Community Rehabilitation and Treatment program, those in Developmental Disability Services programs and the codification of the elimination of the cap for those beneficiaries who are pregnant or in the postpartum eligibility period. We also think it is important to provide for exceptions to the cap when Medicaid recipients are dealing with emergency dental needs.

The proposed increase in the Medicaid dental cap from \$1000 to \$1,500 is a bare minimum increase necessary to make sure that people on Medicaid are not harmed by the increase in provider rates. It will keep their buying power in this program unchanged. We understand that in 2021 only 2.99 % of people on Medicaid reached the dental cap. Despite this small number, the cap is experienced as a painful limitation on access to care. People on Medicaid who are in need of dental work are often forced to forgo the care that would help them keep their teeth or relieve their pain.

The HCA's position is that the Medicaid dental cap should be eliminated. We understand that in order to accurately evaluate this position, the legislature will need information on the cost of such a move. We think it is important to ask DVHA to come back to the Legislature in the context of the 2026 budget year to report on the impacts of this year's dental rate increase and estimations on the cost of raising or eliminating the dental cap.

Sincerely,

s\ Mike Fisher, Chief Health Care Advocate