

September 19, 2016

Senator Mike Shirkey, Chairman
Health Policy Committee
Michigan State Senate
Lansing, Michigan 48909

Dear Chairman Shirkey and Members of the Senate Health Policy Committee:

As a national leader and clinical dentist who supervises dental therapists in Minnesota and as the immediate past president of the Minnesota Board of Dentistry, I write to share my experiences of hiring and employing dental therapists in Minnesota, and urge you to support SB 1013.

I started my dental career over thirty years ago as a solo practice dentist in Bozeman, Montana. I currently serve as the Senior Vice President and Dental Director at HealthPartners in Minnesota, the largest consumer driven nonprofit and integrated health care system in the country. Our dental practice at HealthPartners consists of nearly 75 dentists, 60 hygienists and now 3 dental therapists. Along with our large support staff, we care for patients at 24 individual sites. These patients represent the entire spectrum of dental care including the Medicaid population from Minnesota.

When I served as President of the Minnesota Board of Dentistry, we worked with the state Health Department to publish an independent, nonpartisan assessment of dental therapy's early impacts on the delivery of and access to dental services in our state, as was required by the 2009 law. This report drew on an anonymous survey of almost 1400 dental therapy patients, interviews with employers of dental therapists, and clinic and emergency room data. In short, this unbiased assessment found that dental therapy is working in Minnesota exactly as they were intended. Dental therapists are practicing safely and clinics reported improved quality of care and high patient satisfaction with dental therapist services. Dental practices that employ dental therapists are also seeing more new patients, most of whom are enrolled in public insurance programs and/or from previously underserved communities. The employment of dental therapists in a dental clinic has resulted in direct cost savings, increased dental productivity, improved patient satisfaction, and fewer missed appointments by patients.

The data and research on dental therapy in Minnesota and around the world unequivocally support dental therapists' safety and effectiveness; however, it's just as important for me to share with you how rewarding it has been to work with another type of provider on the dental team and to see the reaction and acceptance of them among my dentist colleagues. When HealthPartners first planned to hire a dental therapist, some dentists expressed uncertainty and hesitancy about this new provider. But once the first dental therapist was integrated into the dental team, interest grew and more dentists requested to have a dental therapist on their teams. Dentists who have hired dental therapists are now able to do more high level and complex dental procedures, because they don't have to spend their days doing routine fillings. Dental therapists continue to

provide excellent dentistry within their limited, specific scope of practice, which is clearly defined by the law and the collaborative agreement between the dental therapist and the supervising dentist.

Finally, I would like to commend you, Senator Shirkey and the cosponsors of this bill, for your interest and effort to advance dental therapy in Michigan. While the dental association and some individual dentists may now be opposed to this bill, as they were in Minnesota at the time it passed in our state, I can tell you from my personal experience that that will change. Every dentist in Minnesota that has hired a dental therapist continues to work with them, and many dentists are now hiring their second or third dental therapist for their practices. Once dentists in Michigan have the opportunity to supervise and work with dental therapists, they will see the great addition they are to the dental team, just as dentists in Minnesota and I witness every day. And for those dentists that do not support the bill and do not want to hire dental therapists, I would remind them that don't have to hire them; dental therapists are simply one more tool in the toolbox to help dentists serve more patients and expand their practices.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. Please feel free to contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David S. Gesko, DDS". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

David S. Gesko, DDS
Senior Vice President and Dental Director, HealthPartners
Minneapolis, Minnesota