

## **WSDA Opposes HB 1317/SB 5392**

### **Establishing the Profession of Dental Therapist**

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**WSDA opposes any proposal to authorize those with less training than a licensed dentist to perform irreversible, surgical procedures.**

#### **Vulnerable Adults Often Have Complex Dental Issues Beyond a Dental Therapist's Scope**

- A 2017 study published by the Journal of Public Health Dentistry concludes expanding dental therapy is not a viable solution for addressing adult care access issues.
- Experience has shown that vulnerable patient populations either need routine, preventive care (such as cleanings provided by hygienists) or extensive dental care beyond the scope of dental therapists.
- Dental providers need substantial instruction well beyond a dental therapist's scope and training to accurately assess each patient's specific needs.
- The most vulnerable populations should not be treated by lesser-trained providers.

#### **Dental Therapists Do Not Make Dental Care More Affordable**

- Experience in other states shows that patients are not charged less for procedures done by dental therapists.
- Estimates for savings, which are minimal, do not take into consideration the additional cost of supervision by a dentist.

#### **There is No Shortage of Care Available for Children**

- Washington is a national leader with its strong safety net for children.
- Washington's utilization rate for Medicaid-enrolled children is comparable to rates for children with private dental benefits.
- If a parent is having trouble finding a dentist for their child, WSDA will help them.

#### **Dental Therapists Have Failed to Expand Dental Services to Underserved and Rural Communities**

- In Minnesota, only a fraction of licensed dental therapists practice in census-designated rural areas.
- Canada's dental therapist program closed in 2011 because dental therapists were not working in rural and remote areas.

#### **Better Solutions to Reducing Barriers to Dental Care:**

**Address the Serious Shortage of Dental Hygienists and Dental Assistants Throughout the State** - This shortage is causing patients to wait several weeks to receive preventive services in community health centers and private practices.

**Increase Funding for Our State's Dental Medicaid Program** - Washington has one of the lowest dental Medicaid reimbursement rates in the nation.

**Expand Dental Residencies** - Unlike dental therapists, dental residents are fully trained and licensed dentists who can perform complex procedures at no ongoing cost to the state.

FOR MORE INFORMATION  
PLEASE CONTACT:

**Emily Lovell**  
emily@wsda.org  
(603) 660-6972

**Trent House**  
trent@trentmhouse.com  
(360) 888-3975

**Melissa Gombosky**  
melissagombosky@gmail.com  
(360) 878-0783