



# North Dakota State Board of Dental Examiners

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## House Education Committee

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Coteau AB Room, State Capitol

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Testimony of the North Dakota State Board of Dental Examiners

HB 1220

### **I. Introduction and Background**

Chair Heinert and members of the House Education Committee, my name is David Schaibley, and I'm the Executive Director of the North Dakota State Board of Dental Examiners ("Dental Board"). I am here today providing the Board's testimony on HB 1220's potential impact on the three professions your Dental Board regulates: dentists, dental hygienists, and dental assistants.

#### **A. Dentists**

One of the Bill's requirements is that accelerated degrees must be "an optional substitute for any degree" offered by that Institution. That requirement contains the condition that the Institution must first offer a traditional degree before it offers an "accelerated" degree. Because no Institution in North Dakota offers Doctorate in Dental Surgery (DDS) or Doctor of Medicine in Dentistry (DMD) degrees, HB 1220 would not impact the licensing of dentists in North Dakota.

#### **B. Dental Hygienists**

Another of the Bill's requirements is that the applicable licensing board must recognize the accelerated "degree as *accredited*."

To help ensure that those who graduate from dental hygiene programs are able to competently provide safe dental care to patients, all 50 states apply the same standard for dental hygiene education programs and proficiency examinations. For

education programs, that means all 50 states require that dental hygiene applicants complete a program accredited by the Commission on Dental Accreditation (“CODA”). For proficiency examinations, that means all 50 states require all applicants to pass the National Dental Hygiene Examination—which can only be taken by students who have completed a CODA-accredited program.

Given those requirements, a student graduating from a non-CODA accredited program and obtaining an accelerated degree as envisioned by HB 1220 would not be eligible for licensure as a dental hygienist in any state. It therefore seems unlikely that an Institution would offer an accelerated dental hygiene degree. Consequently, HB 1220 would not impact the licensing of dental hygienists in North Dakota.

### **C. Dental Assistants**

The final category of dental staff that the Legislative Assembly has directed the Dental Board to govern is dental assistants. One of the Bill’s requirements envisions an accelerated “degree” being issued.

Although obtaining a dental assisting degree is one way to become registered as a dental assistant in North Dakota and is a valuable degree to hold—North Dakota does not require a *degree* to become a dental assistant. Instead, there are about a dozen pathways. Because no degree is required, it seems unlikely that an Institution would develop an accelerated degree program when they could instead more efficiently develop a non-degreed program that meets one of the many other pathways to registration as a dental assistant.

A concern of the Dental Board, however, is that a common theme that exists for all pathways to registration as a dental assistant is absent from HB 1220. Specifically, the Legislative Assembly has directed the Dental Board to review and approve all dental assisting education programs to ensure they produce competent dental assistants who can safely perform their duties. “Board approval” is important to many stakeholders:

- It provides **students** with an assurance that they are getting a quality education and a legitimate pathway to workforce opportunities.

- It provides **training programs** with an assurance that their customers or students will be satisfied that they bought a product (the training) that meets licensure standards and is worth its cost.
- It provides **dentists** with an assurance that the dental assistants they are hiring are trained in the tasks they need to perform.
- It provides **patients** with an assurance that they are about to receive safe, quality care.

### **III. Conclusion**

HB 1220 might make substantial contributions for some high need occupations, but it would not have that type of an impact on dentistry. As a result, the Dental Board seeks an exemption from HB 1220.

In the alternative, the Dental Board seeks an amendment that would provide the Dental Board with the responsibility of reviewing and approving accelerated degrees that might result from HB 1220.

We appreciate your consideration and welcome any questions. Thank you.

#### **Prepared and Presented by:**

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