

Testimony of Representative Lisa Finley-DeVilleville

In support of House bill 1567

Chairman Ruby and members of the House Human Services committee my name is Representative Lisa Finley-DeVilleville, representing District 4 A, which includes the MHA Nation. I'm here to testify in support for of House Bill 1567, relating to dental and oral health care status among Medicaid recipients and workforce support to improve access for low-income children, Native American children, and individuals with disabilities.

As a co-sponsor of HB 1567, I am committed to ensuring that all individuals, particularly our most vulnerable populations, have access to the essential dental care they need. During the 2025-26 interim, this study will focus on understanding and addressing the unmet dental and oral health care needs of low-income children, Native American children, and individuals with disabilities. By examining the specific barriers they face, we can work toward creating solutions that will significantly improve their health outcomes and quality of life.

In rural communities, there are often fewer dental professionals, making it harder for residents to access regular care. In fact, nearly 60% of rural areas in the U.S. are designated as dental shortage areas, meaning that access to essential oral health care is limited or non-existent for many families. For low-income children and Native American children, these barriers are even more pronounced. A recent study found that children in low-income households are more likely to have untreated cavities, and Native American children experience dental disease at rates significantly higher than the general population. These disparities underscore the need for a targeted focus on improving access to dental care in underserved areas.

The study will include a thorough overview of the dental and oral health care status of Medicaid recipients. This critical analysis will shed light on the current gaps in care and help us understand where improvements are most urgently needed. Additionally, this study will evaluate the importance of receiving dental and oral health care services and the far-reaching consequences of not receiving timely care. From general health complications to the expanded costs of future care, we need to understand the full scope of the impacts that insufficient dental care can have on these individuals, especially in terms of long-term health outcomes.

The study will also review state and federal regulations, policies, and procedures that may be limiting or perceived as limiting dentist provider enrollment in Medicaid. Issues such as impediments to enrollment, prior authorizations, attachments, appeals, and delayed payments must be addressed to ensure that dental providers are able to serve Medicaid recipients effectively. I am confident that this study will provide a valuable framework for addressing these systemic challenges and improving access to dental care for those who need it most. As we move forward, I look forward to collaborating with my colleagues and stakeholders to bring about meaningful changes that will ensure equitable access to dental and oral health care for all.

I urge you to give House Bill 1567a do pass. Thank you for your time and consideration.