

April 22, 2022

The Honorable Patty Murray  
Chair  
Committee on Health, Education, Labor &  
Pensions  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Richard Burr  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Health, Education, Labor &  
Pensions  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Bernie Sanders  
Chair  
Subcommittee on Primary Health & Retirement  
Security  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Susan Collins  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Primary Health & Retirement  
Security  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chair Murray, Chair Sanders, Ranking Member Burr, and Ranking Member Collins,

On behalf of the members of our collective organizations, we urge the Senate Health, Education, Labor & Pensions (HELP) Committee to consider H.R.4555, the *Oral Health Literacy and Awareness Act*. This bipartisan bill would authorize the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) to implement an evidence-based education campaign to promote oral health literacy among vulnerable populations over a five-year period. Last year, H.R.4555 overwhelmingly passed the House of Representatives by a 369-58 vote and was subsequently referred to the Senate HELP Committee.

As dentists, we believe oral health literacy is the foundation of a lifetime of wellness. Most oral health ailments can be prevented through the promotion of oral health literacy, with an emphasis on children to ensure they develop and maintain healthy habits into adulthood. Oral health literacy serves as a cornerstone to improving the utilization of health care services and health outcomes among the underserved.

HRSA has already demonstrated a commitment to improving oral health among vulnerable populations. Through prior appropriations legislation, HRSA received funding to develop the oral health literacy education campaign. Enacting H.R.4555 would allow HRSA to move forward with implementation by authorizing \$750,000 per annum for fiscal years 2022 through 2026.

Troubling findings from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) helps to shed a light on the status of our nation's oral health. We failed to hit the Healthy People 2020 target of getting 49% of Americans to use the oral health care system. In 2016, only 43.3% of children, adolescents, and adults visited the dentist, less than the baseline target set in 2007 (44.5%). We should not endure another decade of backsliding.

Dentists continue to observe, and research documents, appalling disparities in dental care and the progression of preventable tooth decay and disease by race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and education. Through the promotion of oral health literacy, all Americans can attain greater health knowledge and improve health outcomes.

The dental community is proud to endorse H.R.4555 and advocate for the promotion of oral health literacy. If you have any questions about H.R.4555, please contact Pat O'Connor at (703) 351-6222 or [patoconnor@kentoconnor.com](mailto:patoconnor@kentoconnor.com).

Sincerely,

Academy of General Dentistry  
American Academy of Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology  
American Academy of Oral and Maxillofacial Radiology  
American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry

American Academy of Periodontology  
American Association for Dental, Oral, and Craniofacial Research  
American Association of Endodontists  
American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons  
American Association of Orthodontists  
American College of Prosthodontists  
American Dental Association  
American Dental Education Association  
American Society of Dentist Anesthesiologists  
American Student Dental Association  
Diverse Dental Society  
Hispanic Dental Association  
National Dental Association

CC: Senate HELP Committee members