

ENHANCING THE ORAL HEALTH WORKFORCE (SB 6146)

Legislators should SUPPORT SB 6146 – Expanding oral health equity and increasing access to preventive dental care.

Prime Bill Sponsor: Senator Mike Chapman

SB 6146 will strengthen Washington's oral health workforce and improve access to preventive dental services statewide. Washington currently faces a severe workforce shortage, especially in dental hygiene, making it difficult for patients to get appointments for the preventive care they need.

This bill creates two important new pathways to increase the number of licensed professionals available to provide basic preventive care under dentists' supervision:

1. Directing the Washington Dental Commission to develop rules to establish a new license for oral preventive assistants (OPAs).
2. Mirroring the policy of a number of other states by allowing internationally trained dentists to pass an exam and work as dental hygienists.

These new pathways will protect patient safety, reduce barriers to timely care, and improve oral health equity in communities that currently struggle to access essential preventive dental services.

KEY MESSAGES TO LEGISLATORS

- *"The dental workforce shortage has dramatically impacted communities across the state — both urban and rural — affecting patients' ability to be seen and get the necessary care needed for their overall health."*
- *"Data shows that delays in seeing a dentist and receiving preventive care increase the risk of more serious oral health and general health problems."*
- *"During a time when federal overreach is creating health care challenges nationwide, it's critically important to strengthen Washington's access to oral health care."*

WSDA CONTACTS FOR QUESTIONS, FOLLOW-UP

If you have any questions or if a legislator requests a follow-up on an issue, please contact:

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