



Please Support A.1896, which Adopts the Dentist and Dental Hygienist Compact

Assembly Regulated Professions Committee Hearing – May 13, 2024

Good morning, Mr. Chair and members of the Committee, my name is Jim Schulz, Director of Governmental and Public Affairs for the New Jersey Dental Association.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today. Thank you to Chairman Stanley, Vice-Chair Speight, and Assemblyman Scharfenberger for your leadership on this important piece of legislation.

On behalf of the more than 4,600 members of the NJDA, I am pleased to register our support for A.1896, which adopts the Dentist and Dental Hygienist Compact in New Jersey. We believe the enactment of this legislation will help address our current dental workforce shortage and improve access to care, all while continuing to protect the public.

As you may recall, the Assembly unanimously passed an identical bill last June. However, the legislative session ended before the Senate had an opportunity to address it.

Dental workforce and licensure issues were focal points of the association prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic merely exposed and exacerbated this crisis.

Four years on, dental practices in New Jersey, and throughout the country, are still experiencing significant workforce shortages. New Jersey is a desirable state to practice according to recent data from the American Dental Association (ADA). However, frustrations continue to mount over the ability to quickly recruit out-of-state personnel due to license processing requirements and antiquated technology. According to the ADA's Health Policy Institute, 1 in 3 practices are actively recruiting dental hygienists and other auxiliary personnel, and 92 percent of practices identify recruiting as extremely or very difficult.

In the wake of the pandemic, New Jerseyans have had their preventative dental care delayed because of these mounting workforce shortages. Chronic licensure complications have delayed office recruitment and the ability of these practices to maintain timely preventative care routines because emergency treatment services will take priority. We believe that this legislation takes a big step forward to improve licensee mobility and office recruitment as well as facilitate improved access to needed oral health care. Moreover, it will help address one of the major relocating challenges for dentists and dental hygienists in our military and public health services, and their families.

The New Jersey State Board of Dentistry and other states' regulatory boards will benefit by providing agreement on uniform licensure requirements, a shared data system for access to primary source documentation of an applicant's credentials and tracking of adverse licensee actions. Increased cooperation among the various state dental boards, and immediate availability of information is critical to protecting the public, which is the licensing board's primary mission.

Importantly, A.1896 will preserve and strengthen the current system for state licensure throughout the country. Dentists and dental hygienists utilizing the compact must abide by the laws and rules of the state in which they are practicing and adhere to that state's scope of practice, ensuring each member state's authority to regulate the profession remains intact.

As of today, seven states have passed this legislation into law, which means the compact has officially been enacted. New Jersey passing this legislation would immediately improve the freedom of movement for dentists and dental hygienists across state lines while eliminating the needless waiting periods and tangential hurdles dentists and dental hygienists, and their practices, experience on a regular basis. Improving portability and eliminating needless waiting periods makes recruitment of quality dental professionals easier, which, in turn turbocharges a practice's efficiency and production. Having a robust dental workforce means more patients will be treated and there is better access to care.

Thank you for your time and consideration of A.1896. I humbly ask for your support for this initiative.