

February 26, 2020

The Honorable Tony Cárdenas
U.S. House of Representatives
2438 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Gus Bilirakis
U.S. House of Representatives
2227 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representatives Cárdenas and Bilirakis,

On behalf of the members of our collective organizations, we would like to express our support for your bipartisan legislation, the *Oral Health Literacy and Awareness Act of 2019* (H.R.4678). The bill authorizes the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) to develop a 5-year evidence-based oral health literacy campaign across the agency's relevant programs.

As dentists, we believe oral health literacy is the foundation of a lifetime of wellness. Most oral health ailments can be avoided by increasing oral health literacy among all populations, with an emphasis on children to ensure they develop and maintain healthy habits into adulthood. Additionally, oral health literacy must be a cornerstone of improving the utilization of care by underserved populations.

HRSA has demonstrated a commitment to improving oral health among the most vulnerable populations, and we believe their efforts to achieve this goal will be bolstered through greater integration of effective oral health literacy strategies. The work this legislation directs HRSA to undertake will provide insights into the outcomes and effectiveness of targeted oral health literacy strategies and will help inform future initiatives to improve the oral health literacy for all Americans.

We are deeply concerned with the troubling findings from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) regarding the status of our nation's oral health. Recent HHS data shows the number of persons who visited a dentist in the past year has gone from 44.5% (2007) to 43.3% (2016)¹. There has been an apparent lack of progress towards the HHS Healthy People 2020 initiative target for this leading health indicator, which is 49% by 2020.

These findings demonstrate the timeliness of H.R.4678 and the need for the federal government to meaningfully approach oral health literacy in a way that produces results for the Americans. Oral health literacy is a vital component in the fight against oral disease, which left untreated can result in pain, disfigurement, loss of school and work days, nutrition problems, expensive emergency room use for preventable dental conditions, and even death.

¹ Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (AHRQ) - 2020 Healthy People June 2019 Report (<https://www.healthypeople.gov/2020/leading-health-indicators/2020-lhi-topics/Oral-Health/data#Jun-2019>)

We stand ready to work with you and your staff to generate support for H.R.4678. Please contact Pat O'Connor at (703) 351-6222 or patoconnor@kentoconnor.com with any questions.

Thank you again for your ongoing efforts regarding this issue.

Sincerely,

Academy of General Dentistry
American Academy of Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology
American Academy of Oral and Maxillofacial Radiology
American Association for Women Dentists
American Association of Endodontists
American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons
American Dental Association
American Dental Education Association
American Society of Dentist Anesthesiologists
American Student Dental Association