

November 20, 2017

Honorable Kevin McCarthy
Majority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
2421 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Majority Leader McCarthy:

On behalf of over 171,000 members of the American Dental Association, we are writing to express our support for H.R. 2422, the Action for Dental Health Act of 2017. More than 47 million people in the U.S. live in areas with limited access to dental care. H.R. 2422 seeks to improve oral health by breaking down barriers to care. This measure was unanimously reported out of the House Energy and Commerce Committee and we encourage House Leadership to bring H.R. 2422 to the floor for a vote.

The bill will allow organizations to qualify for oral health grants to support activities that improve oral health education and dental disease prevention; and develop and expand outreach programs that facilitate establishing dental homes for children and adults, including the elderly, blind and disabled. The ADH bill does this by providing funding for organizations engaged in volunteer dental projects that provide free dental care directly to those in need. But it also establishes a second grant program to promote oral health initiatives designed to facilitate private-public partnerships – collectively called Action for Dental Health initiatives.

A good example of a successful volunteer dental project is the ADA's "Give Kids a Smile" program, which has provided free oral health care services to over 5.5 million children since 2003. The legislation would also increase opportunities for eligible entities to partner with dental schools and the community to provide dental services to the underserved through a program called Missions of Mercy (MOM), which are active in 28 states throughout the country, including California. The California program, known as CDA Cares, has since 2012 provided \$19 million of free dental care to over 23,000 patients. Just last month, hundreds of volunteer dentists gathered at Kern County Fairgrounds in Bakersfield, CA, to provide over \$1 million in free care to over 1,500 patients. H.R. 2422 would allow programs like this to apply for already appropriated dollars to expand their program.

A key initiative in the ADH program is reducing the number of people who visit the emergency room for a dental condition by referring them to dental practices. These emergency room visits for dental problems cost more than providing regular care by oral health professionals. It is estimated that the U.S. spent nearly \$3 billion on ER dental visits from 2008 through 2010, according to a study in the Journal of the American Dental Association (April 2014, Vol. 145:4, pp. 331-337). Also, most ER visits only provide patients with pain medication and antibiotics – but do not treat the underlying problem. While recent

November 20, 2017
Page 2

research indicates that the hundreds of ER referral programs are working, and the use of emergency rooms for dental conditions is decreasing, we cannot let up now. More still needs to be done to expand ER referral programs and H.R. 2422 will help.

Passage of the Action for Dental Health Act will help prevent dental disease and reduce the proportion of adults and children with untreated dental disease.

We are asking you to help all Americans achieve their best oral health by moving H.R. 2422, the Action for Dental Health Act of 2017, to the House floor.

Sincerely,
Sincerely,

Daniel J. Klemmedson, D.D.S, M.D.
President

Kathleen T. O'Loughlin, D.M.D., M.P.H.
Executive Director

DJK:KTO