

**ORAL TESTIMONY BEFORE THE JOINT COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC HEALTH
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GUEST BOARD MEMBER 2019-2020)**

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H.1992 – AN ACT RELATIVE TO DENTAL LICENSING EXAMS

Joint Committee on Public Health, chairpersons, and fellow residents – thank you for your attention, time, and interest in the Commonwealth’s Public Health. I am testifying to advocate in support of Bill H.1992, *An Act Relative to Dental Licensing Exams*. The dental profession has been advocating to end live patient exams here in Massachusetts and throughout the country for many years, and the time to act has never been more necessary.

There are ethical, financial, legal, and moral reasons to bring oral health into the 21st century by ending non-standardized live patient exams, which our medical colleagues left behind decades ago. In 2019, California, Colorado, New York, Washington, Minnesota, and recently Connecticut have all moved forward with alternate means for dental students to demonstrate competency to practice dentistry without subjecting real patients to this archaic practice.

From my public health training, we are primarily charged with preventing known risks. These risks that patients are subjected to have serious economic and public health consequences for some of the most vulnerable populations. While dentists have historically not garnered much public sympathy, students and the underserved populations that typically are subject to these examinations are perceived differently. To offer a brief glimpse into the format for these licensure exams, dental students are required to find a perfect cavity and subject patients to potentially four to nine hours of clinical care after potentially delaying care up to one year. Costs associated with taking this clinical exam range from \$2,500 - \$3,500, assuming that you pass – the independent testing agencies financially benefit from failing students to generate further profit. This is on top of the usual \$400,000 student debt experienced by dental students. Unfortunately, to limit the risk of failing these exams, students offer financial and other incentives to patients to ensure that they come to their four-hour filling.

As a senior at Tufts Dental, I was on the executive board where we helped organize the logistics for students taking the exam – typically on Valentine’s Day weekend. As you may be able to easily imagine on a cold February Saturday morning, weather can be unpredictable. That morning, I found one of my closest classmates sobbing at 6:30 in the morning because his patient just called to inform him that he was in a car accident on his way to the exam but was so

upset that he wasn't going to be able to help his 4th year dental student take this exam, after preparing for this most of his entire senior year.

This is one horror story into this archaic exam, and there are many ways to move forward that our professional dental organizations outline, including one fantastic public health effort to offer licensure through a one-year post-graduate training year that typically provides services to the most underserved at a significant cost-savings to the health care system. We are asking that the committee protect patients and students. Please join the unified voice of dental students, the Boston dental schools, our patients, and the Massachusetts Dental Society to say that we are not supporting this live patient exam.