

Oral Testimony – October 30, 2017

Massachusetts Legislature Joint Committee on Financial Services

Dr. Andrew Tonelli

**In support of H.2197, “An Act Concerning Dental Service Corporations”
(2017)**

Members of the finance committee, Chairmen Michelwitz and Eldridge.

Delta Dental was founded almost 50 years ago as a partnership between the State and the Dental Society to increase access to Dental care. Dr. Walter Guralnick who passed away earlier this year, was instrumental in it’s founding, and served as President for years in the company’s infancy. Delta was built because of the vision and efforts of people like Dr. Guralnick, for whom their primary motivation, was their patients. Since that time Delta, as a non-profit, has grown tremendously; and across all of it’s products it administers in the state it touches over half our population.

I come before you today to report that this is a company that has abandoned it’s founding principles, and can no longer be trusted to operate in the interest of the people of Massachusetts.

At the end of 2016 Delta asked its network Dentists to sign new contracts which would allow Delta to insert itself into our clinical practices at an unprecedented level.

And while Delta members may get a better deal, everyone else will be hurt. As a younger Dentist, my greatest concern, is that good Dentistry, and the best care

for Massachusetts residents will be harder to provide. That the quality of Dentistry in our state will suffer and we will see a slide that pushes patients and practitioners to a lowest-common-denominator type of Dentistry because that's the only thing that will be possible in a market that only serves Delta's best interests.

That said, it is important to acknowledge that there are challenges that Dentists have failed to yet meet. But these changes will make it harder for the next generation of Dentists to be the engineers of that positive change, and they will leave Delta as the final arbiter of dentistry's future in the state.

In Dr. Guralnick's obituary he was quoted, "the consideration you gave to your patients reflected the values in which you believed — human values as well as scientific ones— and what you did reflected not just technical training, but what you stood for."

Over the past year Delta has shown its values, and they bear no resemblance to those which inspired Dentists like Dr. Guralnick to found this company. I feel confident Dr. Guralnick did not Shepherd Delta through its early years merely to enrich its future CEOs. And while I appreciate that it is within the prerogative of a private entity to conduct its business however it sees fit, it is also rightly this legislatures' prerogative to act when that conduct will hurt your constituents- our patients.

We present to you today to advocate for common sense bills to address Delta's actions. House bill 2197 will serve to remove Delta from clinical decisions made with our patients from diagnosis to referral. It will mandate that the state retain oversight of its behavior, necessary now more than ever. It will prevent Delta from forcing Dentists to participate in networks they do not wish, and from arbitrarily locking out willing and capable Dentists from those in which they do.

These are small measures, but they are vital.

I'll leave you with another quote from Dr. Guralnick, "I've always said that if you're gonna work, you should seek to find something that you enjoy doing, and hopefully at the same time you can do some good for some people. Money is not the most important thing, I decry it."

Delta would do well to heed the words of its former president. On behalf of our patients, our practices, Dentists passed on and Dentists who hope to have a say in what the future of Dentistry will look like in Massachusetts, I request positive action on House bill 2197.