



CALIFORNIA SOCIETY OF PEDIATRIC DENTISTRY

June 15, 2006

The Honorable Deborah Ortiz
Chair, Senate Health Committee
State Capitol, Room 2191
Sacramento, CA 95814

Re AB 1433 (Emmerson and Laird)

Position: Support

Dear Senator Ortiz:

The California Society of Pediatric Dentistry supports the passage of AB 1433, which would provide that children entering public schools receive an oral health assessment in the same manner they are currently required to obtain a school-entrance physical examination.

The need to identify children suffering from dental disease (dental decay and oral infection) is well documented. The recent *2004-05 Oral Health Needs Assessment Survey* of over 10,000 randomly-selected California kindergarten students conducted by the Dental Health Foundation found that over half had already experienced tooth decay, more than one in four was currently in need of dental treatment, and most alarming, 4% were in need of urgent and immediate care because of dental pain or infection. With over 500,000 children enrolled in California kindergartens, this means more than 20,000 are in the classroom each day with pain or with an oral infection!

Unidentified dental conditions only worsen with the passage of time. Untreated dental decay in the primary dentition (children's teeth) profoundly affects the developing permanent teeth, leading to a lifetime of oral health problems which are costly in terms of their economic implications as well as the quality of life. Youngsters with decayed teeth are often in pain, can't concentrate in school, miss school, suffer from poor nutrition because it hurts to eat, and are not school-ready or school-attentive. Some school districts in California report that half of all medically-related student absences are attributable to dental problems. Recent figures from the National Center for Education in Maternal and Child Health indicate students aged 5 – 17 lose an average of 1.3 days/100 students due to acute dental problems.

AB 1433 will make it more likely that debilitating dental conditions in young children are identified and treated earlier. The parental notification requirement incorporated in the law supplies information on the importance of oral health, provides information to connect families to Healthy Families, Medi-Cal and other publicly-financed health insurance programs, and

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contains a provision for children whose parents are unable to obtain, or do not wish to consent to, an assessment.

The California Society of Pediatric Dentistry is the professional organization representing California's nearly 600 pediatric dental care specialists in teaching, research and clinical practice. Our mission is to advocate optimal oral health and general welfare of infants, children, adolescents and persons with special needs. As providers, we deal daily with children sent home from school because of pain and because of oral infection.

California's school-age children deserve a legislative solution to a significant health problem too long neglected. We urge you to move this legislation forward.



Martin Steigner,
President, California Society of Pediatric Dentistry

- c: Members, Senate Health Committee
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