



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

Senate Passes Bill to Increase Access to Dentists in Underserved Communities

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Measure would make dentists eligible for “Doctors Across New York”

ALBANY - Untreated oral diseases can lead to a number of health problems, some of them even life threatening, yet a severe shortage of dentists in underserved areas has left many New Yorkers without access to care, according to Senator Catharine Young (R,C,Ind-Olean), sponsor of “Dentists Across New York” which passed the state Senate yesterday.

The legislation (S.2190) would alleviate the issue by expanding the “Doctors Across New York” program and enabling dentists to be recruited and receive incentives to work in communities with dentist shortfalls.

“The lack of dentists in rural and inner-city areas presents a serious health problem that must be addressed. Not only can untreated dental diseases lead to pain, infection and tooth loss, but it can increase the risk for severe medical concerns such as poor birth outcomes, heart disease and diabetes,” Senator Young said.

“Children are severely affected by the sparseness of dentists. According to the Pew Foundation, dental care is the single greatest unmet need for health services among children, with tooth decay affecting nearly 60 percent of kids. That percentage spikes even higher in places where there are barriers to receiving care,” Senator Young said.

“The solution is to create innovative initiatives that attract dental professionals to areas of need. Dentists Across New York would give the state Department of Health (DOH) discretionary authority to include dentists in the existing Doctors Across New York initiative,” Senator Young said.

“According to the DOH, about 24 counties, most of them rural, have emerging dentist shortages, with only one dentist for every 3,000 people. Those figures are alarming,” Senator Young said.

“The Health Department estimates that the state needs an additional 371 dentists to fill the gaps. A study coordinated by the DOH’s Bureau of Dental Health concluded the state’s numbers declined from 16,872 in 1997 to 15,291 in 2006. Data shows New York state dentists have a median age of 52 and have been in practice for more than 30 years. We need an upcoming crop of new practitioners in the system,” Senator Young said.

Another impediment is the \$250,000 cost of establishing a dental practice, which is higher than the cost of forming a physician’s office, according to the Senator.

“Our legislation would assist dentists with education loan repayments in exchange for committing to practice for five years in an underserved area. By increasing access to oral care, it will greatly enhance prevention, early diagnosis and intervention, halting or slowing the progress of most dental diseases. It literally can help save people’s health, and even their lives,” Senator Young said.

“Also, it helps the taxpayers because it decreases medical costs for the more serious related diseases caused by untreated dental issues, and it reduces higher costs from emergency room visits,” Senator Young said.

“I am hopeful and optimistic that the Assembly also will pass this incredibly important solution to help our underserved population,” she said.

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