

HOUSE BILL REPORT

SSB 6020

As Reported by House Committee On:
Health Care

Title: An act relating to access to dental care.

Brief Description: Establishing a school sealant endorsement program for dental hygienists.

Sponsors: By Senate Committee on Health & Long-Term Care (originally sponsored by Senators Thibaudeau, Deccio and Costa).

Brief History:

Committee Activity:

Health Care: 3/23/01, 3/27/01 [DP].

Brief Summary of Substitute Bill

- Authorizes the Department of Health to establish a school sealant endorsement program for dental hygienists and dental assistants serving low-income, rural, at-risk children in school-based sealant programs.
- Upon endorsement, a dental hygienist without dental supervision, and a dental assistant under general dental supervision may assess and apply sealants and fluoride varnishes to children in school-based sealant programs. However, no endorsement is required for dental hygienists currently licensed, and dental assistants currently working under dental supervision.

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH CARE

Majority Report: Do pass. Signed by 14 members: Representatives Campbell, Republican Co-Chair; Cody, Democratic Co-Chair; Schual-Berke, Democratic Vice Chair; Skinner, Republican Vice Chair; Alexander, Ballasiotes, Conway, Darneille, Edmonds, Edwards, Marine, McMorris, Pennington and Ruderman.

Staff: John Welsh (786-7133).

Background:

A recent oral health survey conducted by the Department of Health found that among

second grade children in the state, dental problems have worsened in the last five years. In 1995, when the department conducted its first oral health survey, 6 percent of the children with decay were not being treated. Parents of Head Start kids named dental problems as their number one health concern. Studies have found that children with sealants experience one fourth of the decay of those who do not have sealants, when they are applied properly.

Under current law, dental hygienists can apply sealants only under the general supervision of a licensed dentist.

Summary of Bill:

The Legislature finds that access to preventive and restorative oral health services are restricted and that children are unnecessarily suffering from dental disease. The Legislature intends to address the problem of poor access to low-income children by providing for school-based sealant programs.

The Secretary of the Department of Health is authorized to establish a school sealant endorsement program for dental hygienists and dental assistants serving low income, rural, and at-risk children in school based sealant programs.

A dental hygienist licensed as of the effective date of this act may assess for and apply sealants, and apply fluoride varnishes to low-income children in school sealant programs without an endorsement. A dental hygienist licensed after the effective date of this act must obtain an endorsement.

A dental assistant who has worked under the supervision of a licensed dentist for at least 200 hours may apply for endorsement by the department to apply sealants and fluoride varnishes to low-income, rural, and at-risk children in school sealant programs. Dental assistants practicing as of the effective date of this act may apply sealants in school programs under the general supervision of a dentist without an endorsement.

The department shall report to the Legislature by December 1, 2005, with an evaluation of the school sealant program.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: The bill contains an emergency clause and takes effect immediately..

Testimony For: The school-based sealant program will improve access of low-income

children to oral health services. Dental hygienists and dental assistants can provide sealants in the absence of dentists, which are in critical supply especially in rural areas.

Testimony Against: None.

Testified: Senator Deccio, prime sponsor; Melissa Johnson and Carolyn Robertson, Washington State Dental Hygienists' Association; Dave Michener, Washington State Dental Association; and Norma Wells, University of Washington Dental Hygiene.