

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 6020

As Reported By Senate Committee On:
Health & Long-Term Care, February 19, 2001
Ways & Means, March 7, 2001

Title: An act relating to access to dental care.

Brief Description: Addressing access to dental care.

Sponsors: Senators Thibaudeau, Deccio and Costa.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Health & Long-Term Care: 2/15/01, 2/19/01 [DPS-WM].
Ways & Means: 3/6/01, 3/7/01 [DPS (HEA)].

SENATE COMMITTEE ON HEALTH & LONG-TERM CARE

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6020 be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass and be referred to Committee on Ways & Means.

Signed by Senators Thibaudeau, Chair; Franklin, Vice Chair; Costa, Deccio, Fraser, Parlette and Winsley.

Staff: Rhoda Donkin (786-7198)

SENATE COMMITTEE ON WAYS & MEANS

Majority Report: That Substitute Senate Bill No. 6020 as recommended by Committee on Health & Long-Term Care be substituted therefor, and the substitute bill do pass.

Signed by Senators Brown, Chair; Constantine, Vice Chair; Fairley, Vice Chair; Fraser, Hewitt, Honeyford, Kline, Kohl-Welles, Long, Parlette, Rasmussen, Regala, Roach, Rossi, Sheahan, B. Sheldon, Snyder, Spanel, Thibaudeau, Winsley and Zarelli.

Staff: Tim Yowell (786-7435)

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

Summary of Substitute Bill: The Legislature finds that access to preventive and restorative oral health services are restricted by regulation 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 create a school sealant endorsement program for dental hygienists and dental assistants.

Dental hygienists licensed as of the effective date of this act may assess for and apply sealants, and apply fluoride varnishes to low-income, rural and other at-risk children in school sealant programs without completing the department's sealant program. A dental hygienist licensed after the effective date of this act must complete the department's school sealant program first.

Dental assistants who have 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 children in schools. 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 completing the endorsement program.

Substitute Bill Compared to Original Bill: The original bill stated the Legislature's intent to increase access to oral health care for low-income children.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Testimony For (Health & Long-Term Care): Increasing access to sealants will add vital oral health preventive services to low-income children.

Testimony Against (Health & Long-Term Care): None.

Testified (Health & Long-Term Care): Melissa Johnson, WA State Dental Hygienists Assn. (pro); Linda Hull, WA State Dental Assn. (pro).

Testimony For (Ways & Means): There is a shortage of dentists in the state, so it is important that dental hygienists and dental assistants be able to administer this cost-saving treatment.

Testimony Against (Ways & Means): None.

Testified (Ways & Means): Senator Alex Deccio, co-sponsor; Melissa Johnson, WA State Dental Hygienists Assn. (pro); Linda Hull, WA State Dental Assn. (pro).