

VERMONT LEGAL AID, INC.

OFFICE OF THE HEALTH CARE ADVOCATE

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Dear Madam Chair and members of the Senate Health and Welfare Committee,

I would like to follow my previous letter with some examples of calls that the Office of the Health Care Advocate (HCA) received in 2014 related to access to oral health care. As I previously stated, our office opened over 100 cases related to oral health care access in 2014. Many of these cases involved Medicaid beneficiaries who were having difficulty accessing their dental benefits due to the limited number of dentists in Vermont who accept Medicaid, and particularly due to the dearth of dentists who are willing to take new Medicaid patients.

Here are a few examples of the kinds of calls we received in 2014:

- Mr. A transitioned from commercial insurance to Medicaid. Mr. A's dentist then refused to treat him, even though the dentist is a Medicaid provider, because the dentist has a quota of Medicaid patients that has already been reached.
- Ms. B needed to see a dentist before she could have a surgical procedure done. She tried to find a dentist through the Medicaid website and found that many of the offices listed as taking new Medicaid patients were not in fact accepting new Medicaid patients.
- Ms. C's 13-year-old son had a cleaning scheduled at his dental office. When the family got to the appointment, the office refused to see the child because his insurance had switched from a private plan to Medicaid. While the office accepts Medicaid, they would no longer see him because they were not accepting new Medicaid patients. He would be considered a new Medicaid patient due to his change in insurance coverage.
- Mr. D called the 31 dentists in Rutland listed as accepting new Medicaid patients and was unable to find one that would see him. Mr. D ended up having a painful tooth extracted during emergency hours at the community health center but was still unable to find a regular dentist.
- Ms. E used to be on VHAP and paid out of pocket at her dentist for years. When she transitioned to Medicaid, she asked her dental office if they would accept her Medicaid. The dental office told her that while they do accept Medicaid, they are not taking any new Medicaid patients. She would be considered a new Medicaid patient because of her change in coverage, despite her long history as a patient at the practice.

The HCA strongly supports S.20. Access to dental care is a significant issue in Vermont. Licensed dental practitioners would give Vermont's dental offices an economically viable option for treating additional patients who have Medicaid coverage.

Sincerely,

Julia Shaw, MPH
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Vermont Legal Aid