

October 20, 2021

The Honorable Frank Pallone
Chair
House Committee on Energy & Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Ranking Member
House Committee on Energy & Commerce
2322-A Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Anna Eshoo
Chair
House Subcommittee on Health
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Brett Guthrie
Ranking Member
House Subcommittee on Health
2322-A Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chair Pallone, Chair Eshoo, Ranking Member McMorris Rodgers, and Ranking Member Guthrie,

On behalf of the members of our collective organizations, we would like to express our support for H.R.4555, the *Oral Health Literacy and Awareness Act of 2021*. We appreciate that this bipartisan bill would authorize the HRSA to develop and test evidence-based oral health literacy strategies capable of reaching across vulnerable populations to provide oral disease prevention education through a 5-year oral health literacy campaign.

As dentists, we believe oral health literacy is the foundation of a lifetime of wellness. Most oral health ailments can be avoided by increasing oral health literacy among all populations, with an emphasis on children to ensure they develop and maintain healthy habits into adulthood. Additionally, oral health literacy must be a cornerstone of improving the utilization of care by underserved populations.

HRSA has demonstrated a commitment to improving oral health among the most vulnerable populations. We believe their efforts to achieve this goal will be bolstered by integrating effective oral health literacy strategies.

This legislation is the appropriate response to the troubling findings from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) on the status of our nation's oral health. We failed to hit the Healthy People 2020 target of getting 49% of Americans to use the oral health care system. Only 43.3% of children, adolescents, and adults visited the dentist in 2016, which is less than the baseline set in 2007 (44.5%). We cannot have another decade of backsliding.

Additionally, we continue to see appalling disparities by race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and education when it comes to both receiving dental care and suffering from untreated tooth decay. Ensuring all Americans understand the importance of taking care of their oral health is a vital component of our nation's overall health.

The dental profession is committed to leading the advancement of oral health literacy, and we believe H.R.4555 will increase the recognition that it is an integral component of every individual's health and well-being. Please contact Pat O'Connor at (703) 351-6222 or patoconnor@kentoconnor.com with any questions.

Sincerely,

Academy of General Dentistry
American Academy of Oral and Maxillofacial Pathology
American Academy of Oral and Maxillofacial Radiology
American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry
American Academy of Periodontology
American Association for Dental, Oral, and Craniofacial Research

American Association of Endodontists
American Association of Oral and Maxillofacial Surgeons
American Association of Orthodontists
American Association of Women Dentists
American College of Prosthodontists
American Dental Association
American Dental Education Association
American Society of Dentist Anesthesiologists
American Student Dental Association
Hispanic Dental Association