



Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on Public Health  
In support of S.1169/H.2474 An Act authorizing dental therapists to expand access to oral health  
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The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts supports S.1169/H.2474 An Act authorizing dental therapists to expand access to oral health. This bill will help to promote quality health care at an affordable price—one of the League’s goals.

Oral health is an important component of physical health and well-being. Oral diseases can lead to major chronic conditions, debilitating pain, absenteeism from work or school, nutrition issues, loss of teeth, negative impact on growth and development, adverse pregnancy outcomes and even death. Fortunately, dental disease and poor oral health can be prevented with regular access to dental care and effective patient education. Professional prophylaxis and fluoride or sealant application are proven interventions that prevent cavities and gum disease. Without treatment, gum disease may ultimately destroy bone, connective tissue, and teeth, requiring surgery.

Lack of access to dental care and the high cost of dental care have become a public health focus over the past several years. Medicare does not cover dental check-ups, and many dentists will not accept Medicaid. Rural areas lack enough dentists to service the population. Expanding the provision of affordable preventive services outside of dentists’ offices might reduce the most serious consequences of limited access to dentists. Dental hygienists are potentially well-suited to play an important role in expanding affordable access.

Creating the category of advanced dental hygiene practitioner or dental therapist, as this bill does, would make dental care more accessible and could lower the cost of such care.

We urge you to pass this bill favorably out of your Committee and encourage its passage in this session.

Thank you for your consideration.