

Memorandum in Support

A. 7402 (Peoples-Stokes)

AN ACT to amend the education law, in relation to permitting dental assistants and licensed practical nurses to perform the application of topical fluoride varnish

Applying fluoride varnish to the teeth of young children is proven to reduce dental disease, but too few children in New York are receiving treatments. Allowing additional types of health providers to perform this service would bring New York in line with other states and create more access points where children can receive this preventive service.

Dental disease in children has been called a “hidden epidemic.” Hidden because dental disease is not always apparent until the pain becomes unendurable or until it manifests in an inability to eat, sleep or concentrate in school. More than 14% of children in New York reported one or more oral health problems in 2020-2021. In 2020, only one in every three New York children on Medicaid (32.8%) received a preventive dental visit (national median 41.5%) which includes fluoride varnish. There remain persistent disparities in oral health with minority children and children living in poverty especially affected by poor dental health.

Fluoride varnish is a topical solution applied in less than two minutes without special equipment and with minimal training. Studies show that children who receive fluoride varnish every three months have fewer cavities than those who get it less often or not at all. Fluoride varnish is a standard of practice for dental and pediatric offices and is covered by Medicaid and commercial health insurance.

Allowing additional providers to apply fluoride varnish will give dental and physician offices more flexibility in how they use staff and create opportunities for children to receive this important preventive service. Increasing access to fluoride varnish was a recommendation from the 2022 NYS Early Childhood Oral Health Summit, co-sponsored by the Schuyler Center and the NYS Early Childhood Advisory Council.

Healthy teeth are important to the overall health and wellbeing of children. This legislation will help keep kids smiling by allowing an important preventive service to be more accessible.

For these reasons, the Schuyler Center urges passage of this legislation.

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