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**ASSEMBLYMEMBER WOERNER AND SENATOR FAHY INTRODUCE
DENTAL DESERT RELIEF ACT TO LICENSE DENTAL THERAPISTS
IN NEW YORK STATE**

***Launch of New York Partnership for Dental Therapy Signals Growing Statewide
Coalition to Address Oral Health Access Crisis***

ALBANY - Assemblymember Carrie Woerner and Senator Patricia Fahy today announced the introduction of legislation that would authorize the licensing of dental therapists in New York State. Passage of this bill, commonly referred to as the “Dental Desert Relief Act,” would address New York’s critical [oral health workforce shortage](#).

The bill's introduction coincides with the launch of the [New York Partnership for Dental Therapy](#), a new statewide coalition committed to expanding oral health care access for the nearly 2.8 million New Yorkers who live in areas with too few dental providers.

New York faces a persistent oral health access crisis. Low-income families, communities of color, rural communities, and people with disabilities are disproportionately affected, often going without needed care until conditions become severe and costly. Emergency rooms across the state treat preventable dental conditions every day, at significant cost to patients and public programs.

The proposed legislation would enable dental therapists to practice in New York State. Dental therapists are licensed oral health professionals trained to perform exams, X-rays, cleanings, fillings, and simple extractions, working collaboratively under the supervision of a dentist.

Dental therapy is not a new concept. Fourteen other states, including Minnesota, Alaska, Oregon, Arizona, and Maine, have already authorized dental therapists, with strong evidence of patient safety, quality care, and meaningful improvements in access. Internationally, dental therapists have practiced safely for over a century. The Dental Desert Relief Act would make New York the fifteenth state to embrace this proven workforce solution.

The legislation coincides with the formal launch of the New York Partnership for Dental Therapy, a growing coalition of health care providers, community organizations, patient advocates, and public health champions. Founding members include Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy, the New York Dental Hygienists Association, Health Efficient, American Dental Therapy Association, Common Ground Health, and Community Catalyst.

The Dental Desert Relief Act would establish the profession of dental therapist, extending the reach of dental practices into communities where providers are scarce, and transportation is a significant barrier. Employing a dental therapist enables community health centers and rural clinics to expand capacity without expanding their budgets.

The Act has been referred to the Assembly Committee on Higher Education.

The New York Partnership for Dental Therapy invites community leaders, health care providers, and advocates to join the coalition at www.nydentalthrapy.org.

Quotes

“Research has proven the connection between good oral healthcare and overall health. Studies have also shown that poor childhood dental care can lead to an increased school dropout rate and generational poverty. This Dental Therapy bill will help break the poverty cycle by improving access to dental care for many New Yorkers, creating more opportunity for a healthier state population,” said **Assemblywoman Carrie Woerner (D-Round Lake)**

“The Dental Therapy Licensure Act will completely shift and transform how we deliver dental care across Upstate New York. Applying Medicaid reimbursement for these services will directly address provider shortages that have left rural and underserved communities waiting months for access to a dental care provider. By establishing and expanding the use of dental therapists in community health centers, schools, and mobile clinics, we are extending access to this care for those who need it most and who have historically lacked coverage. I am grateful to have partnered with Assemblymember Carrie Woerner on this bill and several others to expand dental care coverage for New Yorkers across the state as we seek to bridge the gap in dental care for millions of New Yorkers,” said **Senator Patricia Fahy (D—Albany)**

“At the Schuyler Center, we have long believed that health equity begins with the policies we choose to pursue. Dental therapy is exactly the kind of evidence-based, community-centered solution that can transform outcomes for children, families, and communities across New York. We are proud to be a founding member of this partnership and to stand with Assemblymember Woerner and Senator Fahy in advancing legislation that will bring relief to millions of New Yorkers who simply cannot access the oral health care they need and deserve,” said **Kate Breslin, President and CEO, Schuyler Center for Analysis and Advocacy.**

“Every day, we work with health centers that are struggling to connect patients with basic dental care. It's encouraging to see New York taking a serious look at dental therapy as part of the solution,” said **Sally Lewis, DHSc, MSDH, RDH, CDA, Director of Oral Health Programs, HealthEfficient.**

“New York has an opportunity to become a national leader in advancing equitable access to oral healthcare through dental therapy. Across the country, since 2004

dental therapists have consistently expanded preventive and routine care in communities that have historically faced significant barriers to access. ADTA is encouraged to see growing momentum for solutions that prioritize patients and community needs,” said **Kari Ann Kuntzleman, Executive Director, American Dental Therapy Association.**

“Demand for dental care is growing, and community health centers are struggling to recruit and retain enough dental providers to meet that need. That means patients who already face barriers to care may have an even harder time getting the dental services they need,” said **Rose Duhan, CHCANYS President & CEO.** “Every patient deserves timely, affordable dental care, and dental therapists are one way to broaden access. We are encouraged to see ideas like dental therapy included in the conversation about how New York can strengthen its dental workforce and better meet the oral health needs of patients and communities.”

“Sadly, many New Yorkers reside in areas of the state that are dental care deserts. This is especially true for many residents in rural areas and low-income urban neighborhoods. Here in the Capital Region, we have so few providers accepting Medicaid patients that the waiting list at Whitney Young Health for new patients is in the thousands. Launching dental therapy training programs, and subsequent licensure by NYS, would provide an innovative solution to the absence of accessible dental care in many areas of the state. It would provide dentists with well-trained, affordable clinicians to expand the reach of their current practice sites,” said **Dave Shippee, President & CEO of Whitney Young Health.**

New York is in the midst of an oral health crisis, and too many people lack access to dental services. Developing a dental therapy program would be a practical solution to expand access to care while strengthening the existing dental workforce. This is about building a stronger, more collaborative oral healthcare system,” said **Mary Zelazny, CEO of Finger Lakes Community Health.**

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