

## Lou Mansolillo

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**From:** Elizabeth Benz <benz.elizabeth@gmail.com>  
**Sent:** Thursday, April 11, 2024 11:58 AM  
**To:** House Corporations Committee  
**Subject:** House Bill No. 7082 - Fair Share for Dental Care Act

Representatives Solomon, O'Brien, Caldwell, Casey, DeSimone, Finkelman, Kennedy, McGaw, Newberry, Phillips, Potter, Quattrocchi, Sanchez, Serpa, and Voas,

I am writing in support of H-7082, the Fair Share for Dental Care Act.

Rhode Island has an overstrained dental infrastructure, although the insurance companies are portraying the state of current affairs as sufficient. Insurance companies claim that new dentists are arriving into the state in record numbers, however years of data show that these new dentists do not stick around. As a residency program director, I have first hand knowledge that these new dentists, who have multiple job opportunities in RI, leave RI and opt to practice in neighboring Massachusetts and Connecticut. Out of my 18 residents who have entered and graduated the general practice residency since 2016, only one has remained in Rhode Island. Eight former residents entered practice in neighboring Massachusetts and Connecticut mere miles from our border. The other 50% of the residents either entered additional training outside of the state or relocated to other states outside of southern New England. Rhode Island for years has had a reputation as a less than ideal state to practice dentistry.

With the dental professionals in the state aging, retirements of dentists with no replacements, and practices shutting their doors, there is a very high demand for services and not enough dental professionals to provide for the oral health of Rhode Islanders. There is an alarming rate of burnout among dental professionals, especially the younger generation of dentists due to this extreme demand, and inability to keep up. Some dentists have decreased their hours or retired earlier in order to relieve the stress and preserve their mental health. The unknown and alarming issue is the many professionals who work flat out and struggle to keep up with the demand of their patients and ignore issues plaguing their mental health. Studies have shown 25% of dentists suffer from depression and statistics even put the suicide rate of dentists at three times higher than other white-collar workers. Among white collar health professionals, dentists hold the highest suicide rate: 7.18%. Suicide stats for the general population in the U.S. sit at around 0.42%—a staggering and concerning chasm.

The maximum yearly payout of dental insurance plans for patients have been stagnant for many years. The plan maximums (most range from \$1000-1500) provide inefficient funds to adequately treat the patient and return them to a disease-free state. Out of pocket expenses put too much of a burden on the patients and they often forego necessary treatment or spread it out between multiple benefit years. This further compromises the patient's oral health as well as overall health. I witnessed this firsthand as a dental provider who covers emergency call for large hospital centers. Dozens of patients a week come into the emergency rooms across the state with severe dental infections, caused by neglect, or putting off costly treatment to another benefit year. Not only can these infections be life-threatening, but the overall burden that treating these dental infections put on the healthcare system is substantial (both the financial burden and the stress it puts in already overburden hospitals).

At its core, the Fair Share for Dental Care bill is a consumer protection bill. This bill would bring RI insurance regulation in line with our neighboring states. In doing so, the state would stand a better chance of attracting providers to treat Rhode Islanders. This bill promotes patients over profits, putting insurance premiums back into the hands of the patients, allowing them to better their overall health via a healthy smile.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Benz, DMD