



NEW YORK STATE SENATOR

Catharine Young

## Senate Passes Bill to Increase Access to Dentists in Underserved Communities

CATHARINE YOUNG June 11, 2014

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*Measure would make dentists eligible for "Doctors Across New York"*

ALBANY - Oral diseases left untreated can lead to a number of health problems, some of which can even be life threatening, yet a severe shortage of dentists in underserved areas has left many New Yorkers without access to care, according to Senator Catharine Young (R,C,I-Olean), sponsor of "Dentists Across New York" which passed the State Senate today.

The legislation, S.2190-B, would alleviate the problem by expanding the successful "Doctors Across New York" program and enabling dentists to be recruited and receive incentives to work in communities lacking dentists.

"The shortage of dentists in both rural areas and inner-cities presents a serious health problem that needs to be addressed. Not only can untreated dental diseases lead to pain, infection and tooth loss, but it can increase the risk of severe medical conditions such as poor birth outcomes, heart disease, and diabetes," Senator Young said.

"Children without access to dental care experience severe negative health implications. According to the Pew Foundation, dental care is the single greatest unmet need for health services among children, with tooth decay affecting nearly 60 percent of kids. That percentage spikes even higher in places where there are barriers to receiving care," Senator Young said.

“Creating innovative initiatives that attract dental professionals to areas of need would be a positive solution. Dentists Across New York would give the State Department of Health (DOH) discretionary authority to include dentists in the existing Doctors Across New York program,” Senator Young said.

“According to the DOH, about 24 counties, most of them rural, have emerging dentist shortages, with only one dentist for every 3,000 people. Those figures are cause for alarm,” Senator Young said.

“The Health Department estimates that the state needs an additional 371 dentists to fill the current need. A study coordinated by the DOH’s Bureau of Dental Health found that the state’s numbers declined from 16,872 in 1997 to 15,291 in 2006. Data shows New York state dentists have a median age of 52. We need an upcoming crop of new practitioners to serve the tremendous need,” Senator Young said.

Another impediment is the \$250,000 cost of establishing a dental practice, which is higher than the cost of forming a physician’s office, according to the Senator.

“This important legislation would assist dentists with education loan repayments in exchange for committing to practice for five years in an underserved area of New York. By increasing access to dental care, it will greatly enhance prevention, provide for early diagnosis and intervention, and slow or prevent the progression of dental diseases. The availability of a dentist can save people from a lifetime of health problem, and even death,” Senator Young said.

“Also, this bill makes financial sense and will save taxpayers because it decreases medical costs for the more serious related diseases caused by untreated dental issues, and it reduces higher costs resulting from emergency room visits,” Senator Young said.

“We now need the Assembly to also pass this incredibly important solution to help underserved New Yorkers,” she said.

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