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LEGISLATURE TO CONSIDER BILLS TO INCREASE ACCESS TO DENTAL CARE IN UNDERSERVED AREAS

HB 369 and SB 764 Would Establish a Dental Student Loan Repayment Program for Dentists Serving Underserved Communities

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (Nov. 13, 2017) – The Florida Dental Association (FDA) applauds Sen. Aaron Bean (R-Jacksonville) and Rep. Colleen Burton (R-Lakeland) for their efforts to help improve oral health in Florida’s underserved communities. Both lawmakers have introduced legislation to create a dental student loan repayment program to support dentists who practice in a public health program in underserved and rural areas.

“Good oral health is integral to the overall health and success of our residents and our state,” said Sen. Bean. “This legislation will help ensure that Florida’s patients and communities with the most need have access to a qualified dentist to provide preventive care, treatment and relief from dental disease.”

HB 369 and SB 764 would establish a dental student loan repayment program for eligible dentists who practice in a public health program that serves Medicaid recipients and low-income patients in dental health professional shortage areas or medically underserved areas of Florida. Participating dentists, who are graduating with student loan debt averaging from \$250,000 to \$400,000, may receive up to \$50,000 per year to help repay those student loans and can serve in this program for up to five years.

“In addition to being a critical part of an individual’s overall health and well-being, good oral health promotes employment opportunities and reduces the burden of health care costs,” said Rep. Burton. “This legislation will promote attainable dental care, job growth and economic development in underserved areas of Florida, particularly our state’s rural communities.”

This legislation is a key priority of *Florida’s Action for Dental Health*, the FDA’s comprehensive initiative to improve the oral health and overall health of all Floridians. A core objective of *Florida’s Action for Dental Health* is to maximize the utilization and capacity of Florida’s current dental workforce to optimally serve Floridians with preventive and therapeutic dental care.

“The challenge isn’t that there aren’t enough dentists,” said Dr. Michael Eggatz, president of the FDA. “This legislation will provide relief for dentists who can face up to \$400,000 in student loan debt and give them the opportunity to provide much needed, consistent care to patients in underserved areas.”

For more information on *Florida’s Action for Dental Health*, visit www.floridadental.org/public/florida’s-action-for-dental-health.

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About The Florida Dental Association

As the state’s premier professional organization representing Florida-licensed dentists, the Florida Dental Association (FDA) serves as Florida’s advocate for oral health. A constituent society of the American Dental Association, the FDA was established in 1884 to ensure patients receive the highest quality of care from dental professionals. The FDA is the leading expert and advocate on issues affecting Florida dentists and the oral health of Floridians. To learn more, visit www.floridadental.org.