



April 5, 2018

The Honorable Ed Hernandez, Chair
Senate Committee on Health
State Capitol, Room 2191
Sacramento, CA 95818

Re: SB 1464 (Wiener) – Addressing Denti-Cal Access Issues for Patients with Special Needs -
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Dear Senator Hernandez,

As President and Chief Executive Officer of the Gary and Mary West Health Institute, a San Diego-based, nonprofit applied medical research organization dedicated to enabling successful aging, I write on behalf of California's low-income individuals living with chronic medical, mental, behavioral, or developmental disabilities who currently face greater challenges in accessing appropriate dental care than healthier people. The West Health Institute is the organizational sponsor of Senate Bill 1464 (SB 1464), which aims to expand access to dental care benefits provided through Denti-Cal for beneficiaries with special needs. This legislation would instruct the Department of Health Care Services to provide additional funding to reimburse providers for the extra time and resources necessary to provide critically-needed oral healthcare for such patients. Currently, Denti-Cal's standardized policies and payments, based on a healthier population, do not acknowledge the additional costs of caring for people with special needs and inhibit providers' ability to receive proper payment for their care.

We see, first-hand, the impact of providing high-quality oral healthcare to individuals with special needs through our research collaboration with the Gary and Mary West Senior Dental Center (GMWSDC). Our sister organization, the Gary and Mary West Foundation, supported the development of this downtown San Diego, community dental clinic housed within a Senior Wellness Center to serve low-income individuals.

A substantial proportion of the GMWSDC's patients live with pain, infection and malnutrition due to dental disease, and 85 percent of these individuals are covered by Denti-Cal. Many have special needs and have not seen a dentist in years—for others it has been decades—due to the costs associated with dental care.

Appropriately caring for patients with special needs often requires additional time, multiple visits and other modifications compared to healthier patient treatments. Many cannot tolerate being in a dental chair long enough to have the necessary services provided due to their disabilities and others require additional medical screenings at every appointment before treatments can be performed. These factors contribute to additional costs, which are not currently reimbursed under Denti-Cal, limiting the amount of dental practices willing to provide oral care for these beneficiaries.



Page 2

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Your support of SB 1464 is critical. Additional reimbursements will give the vital financial support to Denti-Cal providers currently serving these patients and may incentivize others to deliver this necessary care. This legislation is the first step in the pursuit of a Denti-Cal system that ensures all patients have access to high-quality and appropriate dental care. For these reasons, the Gary and Mary West Health Institute is proud to sponsor SB 1464 (Wiener) and strongly urges your “yes” vote when it is before you in Committee.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Shelley Lyford", is written over the typed name.

Shelley Lyford
President and Chief Executive Officer
West Health Institute
10350 North Torrey Pines Road
La Jolla, CA 92037

For more information about West Health and the Gary and Mary West Senior Dental Center, visit westhealth.org and SeniorDentalCenter.org.