

My name is __Renee Spencer_____, and I'm a Registered Dental Hygienist licensed in Pennsylvania, North Carolina and South Carolina, having practiced for 39 years. I'm an active member of the Southwest Florida Dental Hygienists' Association, Florida Dental Hygienists' Association and the American Dental Hygienists' Association. I currently live in _____Lee County_____ and would love to continue to provide dental hygiene services to the fine people of Florida as I have done in the previously mentioned three states.

On behalf of the FDHA, I ask you to support efforts to increase access to dental care, licensure mobility and loan forgiveness for dental hygienists.

- A recent report found that Florida had the highest rate of emergency department visits in the country for non-traumatic dental conditions for children age 14 and younger. Florida Medicaid covered 86% of those visits and the most common reason for the visit was an abscess caused from a cavity left unfilled.
 - There is not just one solution increasing access to dental care, instead, we hope the Legislature will consider several options including:
 - Following other states that have authorized mid-level dental providers, called dental therapists, to join the dental team. These providers are required to graduate from an accredited dental program, take the same state licensing exam a dentist takes for the like procedures they will perform, then become licensed. Dental therapists are trained to perform the uncomplicated services normally provided by a dentist to extend the reach of that dental practice of community program. But to be clear, the licensed dentists decide what their dental therapists are allowed to provide to their patients. Dental therapists are supervised and must work under the supervising dentists contract agreement.
- Increasing the dental workforce in our state by allowing reciprocity for dental hygienists licensed and practicing safely in other states. The

hygienist must have graduated from an accredited program, passed a state licensing exam, a national board exam, and have practiced safely for several years. Unfortunately, these professionals would have to take another licensing exam on a manikin to be licensed in Florida. Licensing exams are designed for entrée level hygienists who just graduated, not experienced hygienists that are already licensed in another state or even multiple states. While my encouragement for your support of licensure portability may seem self-serving, I would submit that this is a case of wishing to have an increase in access to dental care across the state and helping to serve the under-represented population and minimize the dental and hygiene shortage. Currently the Council of State Government is working with the ADHA, ADA, and the US Dept. of Defense to achieve license portability across state lines through a compact that would eliminate the need for multiple and/or specific-state licensing exams—much like a drivers' license allows for drivers to drive across state lines without taking another exam.

- It can be costly to become a dental hygienist in the state of Florida ranging from \$25,000 to \$80,000 for a 2-year degree. Many of the programs do not afford time for work while the student is in the program. Having a loan forgiveness program similar to the dentists' loan forgiveness program passed in this state will also help those who may not go to dental hygiene school due to the costs and inability to work during their education.

I thank you for your time and your service to the state of Florida.