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## **Baddour Votes to Expand State Oral Health Care Services**

(Boston, MA) – The Senate on Tuesday approved legislation that will greatly expand access to preventative dental care services in underserved areas of the Commonwealth. The bill creates a new category of “public health dental hygienists” within the Department of Public Health to reduce oral health disparities throughout the state and provide equitable services for all residents.

Senator Steven A. Baddour (D-Methuen) said the legislation marks a new milestone in the oral health field.

“This comes as a result of the cooperative efforts between our private and public state agencies, our oral health practitioners, our legislators, and our constituents who have worked so hard and advocated for this bill,” Senator Baddour said. “With its passing, Massachusetts can seal the divide in access to preventative dental care for all residents.”

The bill requires that public health hygienists have at least three years clinical experience and training and enter into a written agreement with a dentist to ensure continuity of dental care. Registered public health hygienists will be allowed to perform specific preventative procedures and services in public health settings outside the general supervision of a dentist, including schools, nursing homes, hospitals and community health centers.

“This is a good bill that took an extraordinary amount of work and compromise, and it places the oral health needs of Massachusetts residents first. The Senate’s vote will allow registered dental hygienists to see MassHealth patients for routine procedures, and more than 400,000 children will now have access to vital health care”, Baddour commented.

Additional provisions of the bill include:

- Establishes a state dental director in the Department of Public Health to oversee the Department’s public health dental program. This position must be filled by a full-time licensed dentist with public health experience;
- Establishes the Office of Oral Health in the Department of Public Health to coordinate the services of public health dental hygienists and oral health policy within the Office of Medicaid and other health and human service agencies;
- Requires the Office of Medicaid to employ a full-time licensed dentist with public health experience to improve, promote and protect the oral health of MassHealth members;
- Establishes licensing requirements and a registration process for dental assistants, enabling the Commonwealth to have a complete list of all state dental assistants; and
- Creates additional revenue for the state from the collection of registration fees for dental assistants.

This bill will now go to the House of Representatives.

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