

Overview of Bill to Support COMOM

For the Health District of Northern Larimer County Board of Directors

Bill Title: SB07-152, Concerning Volunteer Services by Dental Professionals who Hold a License in Good Standing from Another State

Issue Summary: This bill makes changes to dental license laws and the Volunteer Service Act to allow the Colorado Mission of Mercy to include volunteer dentists and hygienists from out of state.

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Bill Summary

The bill allows a dentist or dental hygienist who holds a license in good standing from another state to practice dentistry or dental hygiene in Colorado as a volunteer at the invitation of a group of licensed dentists or hygienists in this state. The bill protects a dentist or hygienist practicing as a volunteer from civil liability under the Colorado "Volunteer Service Act."

Background

The Colorado Dental Association is involved in a project called the Colorado Mission of Mercy (COMOM) which brings dentists and dental hygienists together for an enormous, two day, MASH-like operation in which acute dental care is provided to people who cannot otherwise afford it. It is a very large all-volunteer project that could serve over a thousand people in need of dental care at no charge to patients. The plan is to bring COMOM to Salida County in late 2007 and Larimer County in 2008.

In order to organize this project, some changes have to be made to the laws licensing dentists and hygienists so that volunteer dentists and hygienists from other states can be temporarily licensed. In addition, the dentists and hygienists volunteering must be added to the list of those professionals protected from civil liability under Colorado's Volunteer Service Act.

Why is this issue important?

There is a very large unmet need for dental care in Larimer County and throughout the state. A conservative estimate in northern Larimer County alone is that there are at least 7,100 Health District children and adults (and possibly as many as 18,600) who are eligible for sliding fee scale services at the Health District because they have an income at or below 185% of the federal poverty level and are without dental coverage (with the exception of children enrolled in Medicaid and CHP+). Our dental clinic cannot meet the need for services that exists. Although children are generally able to receive timely care, we currently have a list of about 350 adults who are waiting to be admitted into the practice as regular patients receiving ongoing routine care, which can take up to seven months.

Although the Mission of Mercy project does not alleviate the enormous unmet need, it would provide access to dental care for a number of people who would not otherwise receive it.

Reasons to support bill:

- The bill makes small changes to the law. Under present law dentists and hygienists in good standing in other states may practice in Colorado for 5 consecutive days in a one year period for the purpose of appearing in programs of dental education or research. This bill simply extends that exemption to dentists and hygienists volunteering in the state.
- A large number of professionals who are volunteering their services are already included in the Volunteer Service Act. For example, the act includes physicians, nurses, mid-wives, chiropractors, optometrists, physical therapists, psychologists, and dentists. The bill simply extends the same protection to dental hygienists and dentists and dental hygienists with a license in good standing in another state.

- Without the legislation, the Mission of Mercy project cannot move forward and thousands of people would lose an opportunity to access dental care.

Reasons to oppose bill:

- There may be opposition by the trial lawyers association because they object to the immunity provided in the Volunteer Service Act.

About this Analysis

This analysis was prepared by Health District of Northern Larimer County staff to assist the Health District Board of Directors in determining whether to take an official stand on various health-related issues. Analyses are based on bills or issues at the time of their consideration by the Board and are accurate to the best of staff knowledge. It is suggested that people check to see that a bill has not changed during the course of a legislative session by visiting the Colorado General Assembly web page at www.state.co.us/gov_dir/stateleg.html. To see whether the Health District Board of Directors took a position on this or other policy issues, please visit www.healthdistrict.org/policy.

About the Health District

The Health District is a special district of the northern two-thirds of Larimer County, Colorado, supported by local property tax dollars and governed by a publicly elected five-member board. The Health District provides medical, mental health, dental, preventive and health planning services to the communities it serves.

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