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Advocates Build Support at Statehouse for Dental Therapist Legislation

This week, community based advocates, dental hygienists, and dentists came together from across Ohio for Dental Access Day at the Statehouse, an opportunity for Ohioans to talk to their legislators about ways to address the growing dental access crisis which continues unabated in their communities. Universal Health Care Action Network of Ohio (UHCAN Ohio) hosted the event with support from the Ohio Dental Hygienists' Association.

On March 14, 2017, Senators Peggy Lehner (R-Kettering) and Cecil Thomas (D-Cincinnati) introduced Senate Bill 98 (SB98), legislation that would allow dental therapists to practice in Ohio's underserved communities. Evidence shows that dental therapists are rigorously educated, licensed dental professionals who provide high-quality care in a limited number of treatment services like filling cavities. Allowing dental therapists to work for dentists would address the significant shortage of oral health professionals throughout Ohio.

Ohio has 88 dental health professional shortage areas, counties, or communities where there are too few dentists to meet the communities' needs. Advocates participating in Dental Access Day at the Statehouse reported to their legislators that the lack of access to dental care is creating other health care issues, like sending people to the emergency room for costly care which does not resolve their dental issue.

"Thank you to the advocates who spent a day talking to their representatives about the dental access problem in their communities," said David Maywhor, Project Director for UHCAN Ohio's Dental Access Now! campaign. "SB98 will allow dental therapists to practice in areas where for generations, people have had to drive too far or wait too long to see a dentist. We hope it will be passed quickly so that Ohioans in underserved communities can get the care they need."

UHCAN Ohio is a statewide non-partisan, non-profit organization building the voice of consumers to achieve quality, affordable, accessible health coverage for all Ohioans. www.uhcanohio.org

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