



American Dental Association  
www.ada.org

**Remarks of ADA President-elect Mark Feldman, DDS, on the Introduction  
of the Essential Oral Health Care Act**

**May 24, 2007, 2 p.m.**

**Rayburn House Office Building, Room 2218**

Good afternoon. I'm Mark Feldman, a practicing endodontist and president-elect of the American Dental Association.

I participate in Medicaid and I know firsthand the devastation that severe, untreated dental disease can wreak on the lives of the most vulnerable people—children and adults from low-income families and other underserved groups.

Like Rep. Wynn and everyone here, I was saddened and dismayed by the death of 12-year-old Deamonte Driver, who lived a short distance from here. We have an obligation to honor this child and his family by saying, “No more.” No more needless deaths; No more children unable to eat or sleep properly; unable to pay attention in school; unable to smile because of dental disease that could easily have been prevented and treated.

If we don't resolve to reform the system now, we are ignoring the warning that this tragedy is sending us, and the nation's children will continue to suffer the consequences. And it isn't



American Dental Association  
www.ada.org

just the poor. Developmentally disabled children and adults also face severe barriers to receiving oral health care.

Every dentist I know provides some free or discounted care to people who need it and otherwise wouldn't get it.

We do this both individually and collaboratively. One study published in the mid-nineties estimated that dentists delivered \$1.6 billion in free or discounted care in a single year. But the sad fact is that all of our volunteer and charitable efforts aren't enough, and they never will be. Because charity isn't a health care system.

In most states, Medicaid reimbursement is so meager that, in most cases, it doesn't cover dentists' overhead. The paperwork is onerous and confusing. The whole process is so frustrating that it discourages dentists from participating in the program at all.

It is critical that we build the preventive infrastructure that, ultimately, is the only way that we will end what former Surgeon General David Satcher famously called the "silent epidemic." To that end:

- \* Every child should see a dentist within six months of the appearance of the first tooth, and no later than the child's first birthday.
- \* We need more community-based initiatives, such as water fluoridation, and the broader availability of dental sealants and topical fluoride.



American Dental Association  
www.ada.org

\* We must embrace innovations in the dental workforce. The ADA has modeled a new type of allied dental professional, the Community Dental Health Coordinator, which could greatly enhance the productivity of the dental team, by extending our reach into underserved communities. The CDHC model is unique, in that it combines the provision of preventive services with triage, case management and referral to fully qualified dentists when needed.

Rep. Wynn's legislation would provide for the training of CDHCs.

Ninety percent of the nation's dentists are in private practice. We need to make it possible for more of them to participate in Medicaid.

Congressman Wynn's "Essential Oral Health Care Act" will help states improve the delivery of Medicaid services and make it easier for more dentists to participate. His bill will help ensure that kids get the continuity of care necessary to avoid tragedies like Deamonte's.

The most vulnerable among us—especially children—deserve better. Better than the fate that befell Deamonte Driver, better than the untold numbers of children who are suffering with untreated disease. Dentists can do more, but only if state and federal governments give us the support we need. The American Dental Association asks every member of Congress to work with Rep. Wynn and others to ensure that every American child can face his or her future with a smile.