



**MICHIGAN**  
Oral Health Coalition

September 6, 2023

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Representative Julie Rogers  
Chair, House Committee on Health Policy  
Michigan House of Representatives  
P.O. Box 30014  
Lansing, MI 48909-7514

Dear Chairwoman Rogers and Members of the House Committee on Health Policy:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony support of the Senate Bill 280, which would remove the sunset of the Kindergarten Oral Health Assessment (KOHA) program and expand it to reach all 113,000 children who start kindergarten each year.

The mission of the Michigan Oral Health Coalition (MOHC) is to equitably optimize oral health for all Michiganders. MOHC members and partners include a broad-based network of oral health advocates and providers, dental schools, third party payers, local oral health coalition and health departments as well as health care and advocacy organizations.

## TOOTH DECAY IS THE MOST COMMON CHRONIC CHILDHOOD DISEASE

Although fully preventable with good oral hygiene and access to dental care, tooth decay remains the most common chronic childhood disease (5x more common than asthma) and is responsible for 51 million missed school hours nationally each year. In Michigan, almost half of Head Start children have tooth decay and close to one-third have untreated decay.

More than half (61%) of 3 and 4 year old children in Michigan do not see a dentist in any given year, which means over 67,800 children entering kindergarten do not have critical preventative care and have not have their teeth examined by a dental professional. Children with advanced tooth decay may have distracting pain, may be unable to eat foods essential for growth or sleep well at night. Unfortunately, in its early stages, tooth decay causes no pain or discomfort.

## ORAL HEALTH ASSESSMENTS ROUND OUT THE CRITICAL HEARING & VISION SCREENINGS THAT WE ALREADY OFFER CHILDREN

In 2020, the State of Michigan passed a law to ensure that children have an opportunity to receive an oral health assessment before starting school. Kindergarten Oral Health Assessments (KOHAs) identify students who may require dental care and connect them to that care before they start school in order to keep them in the classroom pain-free.

Local Health Departments have been partnering with schools for decades to provide vision and hearing screenings for school children. These screenings have been instrumental in discovering problems that parents and the children themselves were not aware. Oral Health Assessments are a quick, easy, and non-invasive way to assess tooth decay and make a referral to a dentist to treat that decay. So far, twenty Local Public Health Departments participated in Phase 1 of the Oral Health Assessment program. Ten of these have performed screenings between October 2022 – March 2023. By removing the sunset on the KOHA program, we can ensure a healthier future for Michigan’s children and expanded access to dental care.

The Michigan Oral Health Coalition strongly encourages you to support Senate Bill 280 in order to keep children in the classroom healthy and pain-free.

