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Lawyers Fighting for Health Care Justice



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BY HAND DELIVERY

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The Honorable Marc R. Pacheco  
Senate Chair  
Joint Committee on Environment,  
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State House  
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Anne M. Gobi  
House Chair  
Joint Committee on Environment,  
Natural Resources and Agriculture  
State House  
Boston, MA 02133

RE: Testimony in opposition to HB 3467, *An Act requiring a fluoride statement.*

Dear Chairwoman Gobi and Chairman Pacheco:

Health Law Advocates (HLA) is pleased to provide this testimony on HB 3467, *An Act requiring a fluoride statement.* We oppose this legislation for the following reasons: (1) the proposed notice language may cause residents to avoid public fluoridated water; (2) the proposed language does not clearly provide support for the dental benefits of fluoridation; and (3) the proposed language may increase the chronic disease of tooth decay in children.

Health Law Advocates (HLA) is a public interest law firm that provides free legal representation to low-income Massachusetts consumers denied access to health care. We are affiliated with Health Care For All, the premier consumer health policy organization in Massachusetts. HLA has a long history of supporting children's access to dental care. Our successful class-action lawsuit *Health Care for All v. Romney* improved oral health care for hundreds of thousands of children living in low-income households within Massachusetts.

Maintaining oral health for children leads to a reduction in other health care conditions and improves their dental health in adolescence and adulthood. Fluoridation of community water supplies is one of the safest and most effective means of preventing the most common, chronic childhood diseases – tooth decay. Efforts to prevent childhood dental decay through fluoridation are essential to a child's overall health.

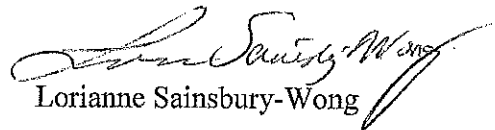
It is also important to note that research indicates that children of lower income households are more at risk for poor oral health and there are racial and ethnic oral health disparities. For example, a report conducted by the Catalyst Institute revealed that 39.4% of non-Hispanic Black kindergarten children have been affected by dental caries, a rate which is

1.7 times higher than non-Hispanic white kindergarten children. Similarly, 40.9% of Hispanic kindergarten children have been affected by dental caries, at a rate 1.8 times higher than non-Hispanic white kindergarten children; and 41.5% of kindergarten children from low-income families have been affected by dental caries, 1.9 times higher than kindergarten children from families with higher incomes. The Catalyst Institute's report indicated that these racial, ethnic and socioeconomic disparities continue through early adolescence. Catalyst Institute, "The Oral Health of Massachusetts Children" (available at <http://www.deltadentalma.com/getattachment/Prevention-Focused/Prevention-Resources/OralHealthOfMAChildren08.pdf/>).

For the reasons above, HLA respectfully asks the Committee to reject HB 3467 and consider amenable language that sufficiently informs consumers about the proven benefits of fluoridation and its prevention of childhood dental disease.

Thank you very much for considering our views.

Very truly yours,



Lorianne Sainsbury-Wong



Monica McEnrue