

Dental therapy legislation passes second house committee unanimously

Written by By Sharon Kayne NM Voices for Children
Friday, 01 March 2019 10:32



Includes amendment protecting tribal sovereignty

SANTA FE – The House State Government, Elections, and Indian Affairs Committee passed legislation that would make it easier for New Mexicans living in rural and tribal areas to access dental care. HB 308, sponsored by Rep. Doreen Gallegos (D) and Rep. Gail Armstrong (R), passed the committee unanimously. This is the second committee that has passed the legislation unanimously. HB 308 now goes to the House floor for a full vote.

The New Mexico Dental Therapist Coalition released the following statement:

“Today showed that momentum in the Legislature is behind addressing New Mexico’s oral health crisis through expanding the dental care workforce. The unanimous support of the amendment to protect tribal sovereignty in how dental therapy is developed on tribal lands was equally important.

“Nearly 900,000 New Mexicans live in areas without enough dentists, with the burden falling heavily on rural, tribal, and low-income communities. More than 25 percent of elementary-aged children in New Mexico have untreated tooth decay, which impacts their ability to succeed in school.

“Dental therapists are licensed dental practitioners who work as part of dentist-led teams to expand access to care. Similar to the way a physician’s assistant contributes to a medical team, dental therapists offer routine and preventive care, and complement the work of dentists, dental hygienists, and dental assistants, increasing the productivity and reach of the dental care team.

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“Today’s legislative victory marks an important step in moving toward improving oral health care and increasing access to care for all New Mexicans.”

The New Mexico Dental Therapist Coalition is statewide group that includes dentists, service organizations, oral health providers, nonprofits, local governments, tribal leaders, and educational entities, among many others. More information on the dental therapy effort in New Mexico, as well as a full list of the New Mexico Dental Therapist Coalition’s extensive membership, is available online at <https://www.nmdentaltherapists.org/>.

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