



# MARY FELZKOWSKI (CZAJA)

STATE REPRESENTATIVE • 35<sup>th</sup> ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Office: (608) 266-7694  
Toll Free: (888) 534-0035  
Rep.Felzkowski@legis.wi.gov

P.O. Box 8952  
Madison, WI 53708-8952

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
February 15, 2018

CONTACT: Rep. Felzkowski  
608-266-7694

## **Felzkowski Bill to Increase Access to Dental Care Receives Public Hearings** *Licensing dental therapists would make routine dental care available to more people*

**Madison-** The Assembly and Senate committees heard legislation Wednesday afternoon authored by Rep. Mary Felzkowski that would increase access to dental care across Wisconsin by creating and allowing for dentists to hire a new member of the dental provider team called dental therapists.

These new providers, similar to a nurse practitioner or physician's assistant in medicine, can provide preventative and routine restorative care in a cost effective and accommodating way. Thousands of Wisconsinites currently do not receive routine dental care because there are not enough providers in rural areas or, for many people with low-incomes, in urban centers. In fact, Wisconsin rates worst of all states in the portion of children on Medicaid who received dental care in 2016—only one-third saw a dentist that year.

“This is just one innovative solution to a major health care problem in Wisconsin that has proven successful in other states, including our western neighbor of Minnesota,” said Rep. Mary Felzkowski. “Our bill increases dental access, gives dentists the opportunity to expand their patient base and grow their business, and provides greater choice and affordability in healthcare. We can do more for the hundreds of thousands in our state who are suffering from a lack of access to dental care.”

Most counties in Wisconsin face dentist shortages. The federal government reports that shortages exist in 60 of 72 counties, affecting 1.5 million Wisconsinites (more than one fourth of the state's population). The more than one million residents who depend on Medicaid for dental benefits face additional barriers—only 37% of dentists in the state accept Medicaid.

“Too many of our residents suffer from dental diseases that are preventable with routine care,” said Matt Crespino, Associate Director of the Children's Health Alliance of Wisconsin. “The people we hear from cite the high cost of care or not being able to find a dentist that will accept their insurance. We need to make changes that will bring more, affordable options to the average resident of our state. For these reasons and more, we support this dental therapy legislation.”

AB 945 would allow a licensed dental therapist to work under a dentist's supervision, performing a pre-determined, limited scope of procedure that would include routine preventive and restorative care like filling cavities. The bill also creates a Collaborative Management Agreement (CMA) that allows the dentist as the employer to control the actions of the dental therapist under their supervision.

The use of dental therapists on the oral health care team is not new; more than 50 countries, as well as in Alaska, Minnesota, Oregon, and Washington allow dentists to hire a dental therapist, extending care into rural areas, to low-income and uninsured patients, and on sites such as schools and nursing homes.

Assembly Bill 945/Senate Bill 784 will now need to receive votes from their respective committees before heading to the Assembly and Senate floors.

###

[Click here](#) for a copy of a joint memo from several Wisconsin organizations that support dental therapy.