



February 12th, 2025

Chairman Harb
House Resources, Recreation, and Development
Subject: Testimony to HB 691

Dear Honorable Chair and Committee Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. For the record, my name is Louis Esposito, and I am the Executive Director of ABLE NH. ABLE NH is a disability justice organization and a nonpartisan, nonprofit entity that fights for the civil and human rights of children and adults with disabilities.

I am writing to express my strong opposition to HB 691, which proposes prohibiting the addition of fluoridation chemicals to public water systems. This measure would have significant adverse effects on oral health, particularly for individuals with disabilities who already face substantial challenges in accessing dental care.

Individuals with disabilities often encounter numerous barriers when seeking dental care, including:

- **Limited Availability of Dentists Accepting Medicaid:** Despite the implementation of the New Hampshire Smiles Adult Program, which provides comprehensive dental coverage to adults with Medicaid, the number of dentists accepting Medicaid remains limited. This scarcity makes it challenging for individuals with disabilities to find providers willing to accept their insurance.
- **Physical Barriers:** Many dental offices lack necessary accommodations such as wheelchair accessibility, adjustable chairs, or specialized equipment, making it difficult for individuals with mobility impairments to receive adequate care.
- **Sensory Barriers:** Individuals with sensory sensitivities, including those with autism spectrum disorders, may find the typical environment of dental offices overwhelming due to bright lights, loud noises, and unfamiliar sensations, leading to heightened anxiety and discomfort during visits.
- **Transportation Challenges:** Given the limited number of dentists accepting Medicaid and equipped to handle special needs, individuals often have to travel considerable distances to access care. This requirement poses significant challenges, especially for those relying on public transportation or caregiver assistance.

Preventative measures are crucial in maintaining oral health and preventing more severe dental issues. Fluoridation of public water systems is a proven, cost-effective strategy to reduce the incidence of dental caries across populations. For individuals with disabilities, who may face challenges in maintaining daily oral hygiene routines due to physical or cognitive limitations, access to fluoridated water provides an essential layer of protection against tooth decay.

Removing fluoride from public water systems would eliminate this critical preventative measure, disproportionately affecting those who already face significant barriers to dental care. This action could lead to an increase in dental issues, higher demand for dental treatments, and escalated healthcare costs, further straining an already overburdened system.

Prohibiting the addition of fluoridation chemicals to public water systems, as proposed in HB 691, would undermine public health efforts and disproportionately impact individuals with disabilities. Instead of removing such preventative measures, we should focus on enhancing access to dental care, find ways to increase the number of providers accepting Medicaid, and ensuring that dental practices are equipped to accommodate individuals with diverse needs.

For these reasons, I strongly urge the committee to reject HB 691.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Louis Esposito". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Louis Esposito
Louis@ablenh.org

References

New Hampshire Department of Health and Human Services. (2023, March 31). *NH DHHS Announces Launch of Medicaid Dental Coverage for Adults on April 1*. <https://www.dhhs.nh.gov/news-and-media/nh-dhhs-announces-launch-medicaid-dental-coverage-adults-april-1>