

OPEN LETTER TO THE U.S. CONGRESS

Dear Congress—

The mouth is the gateway to many vital functions of a healthy body. We urge you to rightly prioritize dental disease and oral health conditions equally alongside other serious medical conditions as you seek solutions to improve the nation's health.

The failure of our nation to recognize the fatal and costly consequences that result from uneven access to dental care has already led to the deaths of two children. In 2007, ***Deamonte Driver (age 12) of Maryland and Alexander Callendar (age 6) of Mississippi died because bacteria from a tooth infection spread when their dental disease remained untreated.*** Dental disease was also responsible for the death of Diane Stamps of Utah, an adult Medicaid patient who died when a tooth infection led to meningitis in her spinal fluid and traveled to her brain.

In the case of Deamonte Driver, he spent six weeks under hospital care after his tooth infection spread to his brain. ***Treating his tooth infection earlier with an \$80--\$100 tooth extraction could have saved his life.*** Earlier dental treatment would also have saved the State of Maryland \$250,000 for the cost of his intensive, in-patient hospital care.

People without dental insurance often forego or delay routine dental care until their condition deteriorates and emergency treatment is needed. ***Unlike many medical conditions that run their course without professional intervention, dental conditions rarely heal on their own.*** Left untreated, dental disease usually worsens over time. At advanced stages, dental disease is much more costly and difficult to treat.

Still, basic dental care remains beyond the reach of 130 million Americans who have no dental insurance coverage. For every American that lacks health insurance, there are two more without dental insurance. In 2005, ***when two Harvard researchers interviewed people without health care coverage, "the most common complaint they heard was about teeth."***

Dental disease, if diagnosed and treated promptly, is almost entirely preventable. As Congress works to improve our health care system, sensible strategies that include simple preventive interventions and low-cost treatments to ensure good dental and oral health are essential for the total health of our citizens.

By adopting policies to prevent and treat dental disease before it can cause significant health consequences, Congress can save lives, reduce societal costs, and end needless pain and suffering.

Yes, my organization agrees to support the open letter to the U.S. Congress to prevent dental disease and promote oral health.

Approved by:

Title:

Organization:

Email address:

Address:

Phone:

Fax:

Please return this form by August 25 to:

Melissa Hoebbel at Melissa@oralhealthamerica.org