



**INDIANA
COMMUNITY ACTION
POVERTY INSTITUTE**
Research and Public Policy

Testimony before the House Public Health Committee

HB 1254

January 12, 2026

Hello Chairman Barrett & Committee Members,

My name is Lauren Murfree. I am a policy analyst with the Indiana Community Action Poverty Institute, thank you for allowing me to speak today in support of HB 1254.

We are hopeful the adjustments proposed in HB 1254 for dental hygienists will allow for more qualified workers to be eligible to take the examination required to practice in our state, which will help reduce the current gaps in dental care present in Indiana.

According to a study conducted by the IU Bowen Center for Health Workforce, 68% of our counties are designated as not having enough dental professionals for the needs of the local population, or Dental Health Professional Shortage Areas. The lack of dental health professionals can have real-life implications on the well-being of Hoosiers, as oral health is not separate from physical health.

Individuals living in dental deserts are [26% less likely](#) to see a dentist, raising concerns about other health conditions that could arise because of delayed oral care. There are documented links between oral health, brain health and cardiovascular health, as well as poor oral health being positively associated with increased risk of stroke. Additionally, in rural states like Indiana, transportation is a significant challenge-Hoosiers must travel far distances in order to access oral healthcare. Research conducted by the CareQuest Institute for Oral Health in 2024 found that more than 1 in 10 Hoosiers live over 30 minutes away from their dental treatment center, categorizing them as living in a dental desert and making it difficult to access routine and intensive dental care. The Bowen center also found in, a 2024 study that a higher [number of dentists and dental hygienists are practicing in urban areas](#) as opposed to rural communities.

In addition, to the present shortage of dental healthcare providers and the distance needed to obtain dental care, the high cost of dental healthcare has also contributed to over [one in ten adults in Indiana](#) having unmet dental needs. The fear of looming debt that could occur from dental needs deters Hoosiers from seeking dental care as one person shared with us, *“I am retired and on a fixed income. High dental bills are hard to pay/pay down. I currently have a one-thousand plus dollars bill and still need more dental work.”*

We are hopeful this bill may help with both the shortage of oral healthcare professionals and be a potential steppingstone to reducing costs and issues with access for Hoosiers. We are excited for this committee to continue to consider approaches to support the health of Hoosiers this session and thank you for your time.

Sources:

1. <https://bowenportal.org/indiana-dental-health-workforce-in-context/>
2. [State Oral Health Dashboard - CareQuest Institute](#)
3. [2024 Indiana Oral Health Workforce Data Report](#)