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# UNIVERSITY OF PIKEVILLE

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## COLLEGE OF DENTAL MEDICINE

University of Pikeville  
**Dental Medicine**  
*Office of the Dean*

August 4, 2023

Senator Steve West, ARRS Committee Co-Chair  
Representative Derek Lewis, ARRS Committee Co-Chair  
702 Capital Avenue  
3<sup>rd</sup> Floor Annex  
Frankfort, Kentucky 40601

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Dear Co-Chairs West and Lewis:

After graduating from the University of Kentucky College of Dentistry in 1990, I practiced dentistry in my hometown, Carlisle (Nicholas County) and in Mt. Olivet (Robertson County), the smallest county in Kentucky. I eventually became the Chief of Dental Public Health at the University of Kentucky College of Dentistry and now serve as the founding Dean of the University of Pikeville College of Dental Medicine. For years, I have worked to improve access to care for underserved Kentuckians. I was thrilled when Medicaid expanded to cover additional dental services, especially dentures. Many people in Eastern Kentucky lost their dentures in the flood last summer. Even before the flood, many Kentucky Medicaid enrollees needed dentures and could not afford them. Current data from the 2023 America's Health Rankings Report documents that Kentucky:

- Has the highest rates of tooth extractions in the nation for those 65 years and older.
- Is ranked 5<sup>th</sup> worst in the nation for patients avoiding dental care because of cost.
- Is ranked 2<sup>nd</sup> to last in the nation for regular dental visits for all ages.

Dentures improve overall health, self-esteem, relationships, communication, and the ability to get a job. It is hard to convey in words how important this is to Kentuckians – especially our

most vulnerable citizens. *Please do what you can to ensure dentures will continue to be covered under Medicaid.*

I was a Medicaid provider in general practice for years in rural Kentucky. Though the reimbursement rates were lower than insurance rates, I made a decent living. The Kentucky Medicaid rates have increased since I began practicing over 30 years ago, **BUT** the MCOs don't pay the Kentucky Medicaid rates. It is no longer financially sustainable to be a Medicaid provider. Dentists don't even break even. The MCO rate of \$38 to extract a tooth doesn't even cover the cost of the staff and necessary PPE (personal protection equipment).

A major goal of the new University of Pikeville College of Dental Medicine is to provide care for the most vulnerable and underserved people in Eastern Kentucky. My concern as the Dean is that it will be very difficult for our new dental school to be financially sustainable as the major Medicaid dental safety net in Eastern Kentucky with the current MCO fees. Another goal of the new University of Pikeville College of Dental Medicine is to graduate dentists who will practice in rural and underserved areas of Kentucky. But these communities have disproportionately higher numbers of Medicaid enrollees, and it will be difficult for our graduates to set up financially sustainable practices in these areas as Medicaid providers with the current MCO fees.

As a result of the great exodus of dentists from the Medicaid program, we have an access to care crisis in Kentucky with many of our citizens, suffering from dental infections, abscesses, and toothaches who are unable to find a provider to help them. The current MCO Network Adequacy Requirements state that the wait time for a routine dental appointment should not exceed 30 calendar days and the wait time for an urgent need should not exceed 48 hours. However, patients and dentists report that the wait is often 3-6 months, even for acute infections. MCOs are required to have a dental provider available within 60 miles or 60 minutes of an enrollee's home. This requirement is routinely not met as patients often must drive to Lexington and Louisville from far western or far eastern Kentucky to get the dental care they need. The Kentucky Department for Medicaid Services documents over 1.6 million Kentuckians were enrolled in Medicaid in July 2023 ([KYDWMMCC072023.pdf](#)). This accounts for over one third of Kentucky citizens. **WE MUST HOLD THE MCOs ACCOUNTABLE FOR ADEQUATE NETWORKS AND ADEQUATE PAYMENT TO ENSURE CARE FOR KENTUCKIANS.** Requiring MCOs to pay out of network fees when the MCO Network Adequacy Requirements are not met is a potential solution.

Many Kentuckians are suffering from unmet dental needs unnecessarily. But this isn't just a "teeth problem." Dental infections worsen diabetes and contribute to heart disease and strokes. Kentucky has some of the highest rates of diabetes and heart disease in the nation. You are in positions of power and influence. Please do what you can to help.

Sincerely,

*Pamela Stein DMD, MPH*

Pamela Sparks Stein, DMD, MPH  
Dean, University of Pikeville College of Dental Medicine

