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MDAC MOURNS LOSS OF STALWART ORAL HEALTH CHAMPION
U.S. Representative Elijah Cummings fought for improved oral health for all Americans

U.S. Representative Elijah E. Cummings (D-MD), an esteemed statesman and stalwart oral health champion, died on October 17, 2019 from complications of long standing health issues. He was 68 years old. Cummings was an exceptional man of extraordinary passion, commitment and dedication to his beloved Baltimore, the state of Maryland, and the nation. His tireless work and unprecedented actions to ensure access to oral health care, particularly for disadvantaged children, has changed lives for countless Marylanders and people throughout the country.

For more than 20 years, Cummings represented Maryland's 7th congressional district, which includes half of Baltimore City, precincts in Baltimore County, and most of Howard County. He was a powerful crusader for social justice and a strong advocate for improved access to oral health care. Following the 2007 death of Deamonte Driver from a dental infection that spread to his brain, Cummings helped kick start the state's first oral health plan and was a staunch supporter of Maryland's efforts to improve the oral health of its children. In 2007, he introduced H.R. 2371 - "Deamonte's Law", a bill to improve access to dental care for underserved children, increase the number of pediatric dentists, and increase the capacity of community health centers to provide dental care.

Cummings, co-chair of the Congressional Oral Health Caucus, worked to expand dental coverage through Medicaid, Medicare, the Affordable Care Act, and the Department of Veterans Affairs. He introduced legislation designed to address the shortage of dental care providers in rural areas, increase the number of providers that accept Medicaid, expand National Health Service Corps scholarship and loan repayment programs to include dental care, and support programs to educate non-dental professionals about oral health. He also worked to increase access to dental care through school-based and community health centers, and secure additional funding for oral health research.

In a February 13, 2019 speech on the House floor, Cummings announced his plan to reintroduce his comprehensive Dental Reform Act this Congress, saying, "Fortunately, we have made great strides in access to dental care, particularly for children, since Deamonte's death in 2007. Passage of the Children's Health Insurance Program Reauthorization Act and the Affordable Care Act have filled the gaps in dental care for children who are eligible for these programs....Yet there is more that must be done...Dental services must no longer be thought of as an optional health benefit for children or adults."

Optimal Oral Health for All Marylanders