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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

BILL PAVES WAY TO INSTITUTE, EXPAND DENTAL SERVICES IN COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTERS

(Columbia, MD – May 13, 2019) –Today Governor Larry Hogan signed SB158/HB332 - *The Maryland Department of Health – Community Dental Clinic Grants Program* into law, a bill that will establish a capital grants program to institute or expand dental services in community health centers. Senator Guy Guzzone (D-Howard County) sponsored the bill in the Senate, and Delegate Mike McKay (R-Washington and Allegany Counties) in the House. The Maryland Dental Action Coalition (MDAC), the state’s leading non-governmental oral health policy and advocacy organization, strongly supported the bill.

In 2018, MDAC surveyed community health centers and found that between 75% and 85% thought that capital grant support would be important in establishing or expanding dental capacity. The Community Dental Clinic Grants program will provide capital support for dental equipment, the renovation of a dental suite, or the purchase of space - investments that can be difficult for community health centers because they also invest significant resources into providing for the uninsured. This bill will strengthen the oral health safety net provider system to serve the growing number of Marylanders needing immediate and ongoing dental care.

“The Community Dental Clinic Grants Program will provide much-needed funding to increase the capacity of community health centers to treat the growing number of low-income Maryland adults who rely on them for dental care,” said Senator Guy Guzzone.

Delegate Mike McKay added, “Good oral health is an integral part of good overall health, yet many Marylanders lack access to dental care. Community health centers will now have a source of funding to establish or expand dental services, particularly in rural areas of the state where it is often difficult to access care.”

Chrisie Mulcahey, Executive Director of Health Partners, a community health center based in Charles County said, “The Community Dental Clinic Grants Program will help community health centers like Health Partners increase our capacity to serve the growing number of children and adults in our community who are uninsured or on Medicaid. This program will help ensure that all Marylanders will be able to access the dental care they need, regardless of their financial circumstances.”

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“MDAC applauds Senator Guy Guzzone and Delegate Mike McKay for their continued leadership to improve the oral and overall health of all Marylanders, and the Maryland General Assembly for its support of another key piece of legislation to expand access to dental care,” said MDAC Executive Director Mary Backley. “Community health centers and private providers are critical components of any Medicaid provider network. To improve access to dental services for children and adults with Medicaid, we need to build dental capacity and expand provider participation in the Medicaid program. All children in Medicaid have dental coverage. With the implementation of the Medicaid adult dental waiver program and a capital funding program to build capacity, Maryland is taking a significant step forward to improve dental coverage and access to care for adults.”

Last session, the Maryland General Assembly unanimously passed SB 284, which established an adult dental waiver program in Medicaid. Governor Larry Hogan signed the bill into law. The adult dental waiver program will serve nearly 40,000 adults ages 21-64 statewide who are dually eligible for Medicaid and Medicare. Participants, who previously had no dental coverage, will have access to diagnostic, preventative and restorative dental services. The Community Dental Clinics Grant program will help ensure the success of the waiver program.

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About MDAC: The Maryland Dental Action Coalition (MDAC), the state’s leading non-governmental oral health policy and advocacy organization, works to improve the oral health of all Marylanders through increased oral health promotion, disease prevention, education, advocacy and access to oral health care. MDAC leads the development of the five-year Maryland Oral Health Plan and partners with individuals and organizations working to develop and implement initiatives to improve the oral health of all Marylanders.

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