

**Statement of Elijah E. Cummings**

**Introduction of the Comprehensive Dental Reform Act**

**Capitol Building Room S-115**

**June 7, 2012**

I am proud to join Senator Sanders this morning to introduce the Comprehensive Dental Reform Act. This bill addresses many of the unmet needs that still exist in oral health care and provides the resources to address the disparities that too often limit access to care in communities across our nation.

I thank Senator Sanders for his leadership on this issue and his commitment to eliminating oral health disparities. This bill, borne out of his commitment to Vermont and informed by that state's groundbreaking efforts to expand care, will benefit people in underserved areas throughout the entire United States.

Lack of access to dental health care presents a real threat to public health. It was just five years ago that twelve-year-old Deamonte Driver died after his mother could not find a dentist to treat his abscessed tooth. Tragedies like this are entirely preventable with investments in oral health care.

This bill represents a promise to the American people that dental health will no longer be a privilege. By making investments in our oral health workforce, additional dental professionals will be available to address the demand for oral health care in areas of need. Emergency funding will help expand the resources available to the National Health Service Corps to train a new generation of dental providers.

This bill makes mobile and school-based services available to children and adults in the communities where they live and work. And additional resources will be available to Federally Qualified Health Centers and other clinics that provide a safety net for individuals in need of dental care.

With this bill, dental coverage will be expanded to beneficiaries of veterans' programs, Medicaid, and Medicare to make services available to those too often left behind: our veterans, our poor, and our elderly. This legislation brings us closer to the day when no one will suffer for lack of care.

I am proud to co-sponsor this legislation and look forward to continuing to work with Senator Sanders on this important issue.

Thank you.

