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## MDA Advocacy Report: 2023 to Date, and What's Next

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MDA Advocacy team leaders include (from left): Neema Katibai, MDA manager of government and insurance affairs; Bill Sullivan, MDA interim executive director; Dr. Jason Mashni, MDA Committee on Government and Insurance Affairs chair; and Dr. Elizabeth Ralstrom, MDA Dental PAC chair. (Photos: Gary Shrewsbury.)



# MDA Advocacy Report: 2023 to Date, and What's Next

By Jason Mashni, DDS  
Chair, MDA Committee on Government and Insurance Affairs

**P**rior to its summer recess, the Michigan Legislature had an eventful first half of 2023, with completely new legislative districts, more than 50 new legislators, and,

for the first time in nearly 40 years, the Democratic Party controlling both the governor's office and the Legislature, albeit with a slim majority.

The Legislature tackled a broad variety of issues that have been longtime priorities for the Michigan Democratic Party and Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, such as reproductive rights, labor reform, education reform, and repealing the pension tax. Additionally, the Legislature passed the Fiscal Year 2023-24 State Budget, which Gov. Whitmer signed at the end of July.

Over the course of this year, the MDA has been working closely with legislators and key stakeholders to advance the MDA's Legislative and state budget priorities. In this article, we're pleased to be able to share some great progress on issues important to dentistry and provide some insight into our plans for the rest of this year.

## **Network leasing transparency legislation: SB 281**

Over the last several years, the MDA has heard from countless members who have struggled to navigate network leasing arrangements. The MDA worked closely with Sen. Sam Singh (D-East Lansing) to introduce SB 281, which requires more transparency in network leasing by directing dental benefits companies to disclose to participating dentists all third parties that have access to their networks. Also, the bill requires third parties to abide by the original contract signed by a dentist, and provides the dentist with an opt-out of having

the contract leased, without retaliation from the dental benefit company offering the contract.

After the bill was introduced, the MDA worked with the Michigan Department of Insurance and Financial Services, Senate leadership, and other stakeholders to ensure the bill's passage in the Senate. The bill passed the Senate Health Policy Committee on a 9-0 vote and then passed the full Senate on a 36-1 vote. The sole "no" vote was from Sen. Tom Albert (R-Lowell).

*What's next?* Before SB 281 can be signed into law by the governor, the Michigan House of Representatives must go through the committee process and pass the full House with a majority vote. The bill has been referred to the Michigan House Health Policy Committee.

## **Kindergarten oral health assessment: SB 280**

In 2020, the Michigan Legislature adopted a law that required the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services to establish a children's oral health assessment program. While this concept was supported by the MDA, the initial law was set to expire on Jan. 1, 2024, and did not require parents and guardians to ensure their children received oral health assessments.

The MDA worked closely with the Michigan Oral Health Coalition and the bill sponsor, Sen. Singh, to secure SB 280's passage through the Senate earlier this year. SB 280 will help thousands of children access necessary care and reduce the amount of classroom time missed due to dental issues.

*What's next?* Similar to SB 281, SB 280 was referred to the Michigan House Health Policy Committee, where it awaits a hearing. The bill will also have to receive a majority vote from the full Michigan House of Representatives, before being sent to the governor's desk for her signature.

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## Good news in the FY 2023-24 state budget

The MDA had another successful state budget cycle this year, after securing a historic investment into the adult dental Medicaid program last year. This year, the MDA was able to secure a \$50,000 increase in the grant for the Michigan Donated Dental Services (DDS) program, which the MDA administers. This brings the total grant to \$200,000. This will help the DDS program expand its list of volunteers and service to underserved Michigan residents. (For more information on the DDS program, visit [michigandental.org/DDS](http://michigandental.org/DDS).)

Additionally, the MDA advocated for a significant increase in Medicaid reimbursement for general anesthesia. While the governor's budget included an increase to this reimbursement, additional funding is required for general anesthesiologists to be able to accept Medicaid cases more frequently.

*What's next?* The MDA has been

working closely with the MDHHS as its Medicaid provider enrollment team is growing the pool of dentists that accept Medicaid in Michigan. With the many changes to the adult dental Medicaid program becoming effective this year, the MDA and MDHHS have prepared resources, including webinars, for dentists to learn more about the program. If you're interested in learning more about the changes to the adult dental Medicaid program, please contact April Stopczynski, MDA manager of access and prevention, at [astop@michigandental.org](mailto:astop@michigandental.org). You may also visit [michigandental.org/Medicaid](http://michigandental.org/Medicaid).

## Teledentistry protections

With the increase in the use of teledentistry over the last few years, it is important for Michigan to have clear laws that protect patient safety and privacy, require the standard of care be applied the same to teledentistry as in-person dentistry, and to ensure that patients have recourse for inap-

propriate uses of teledentistry.

The MDA has worked with the MDHHS to develop a legislative proposal to accomplish these aims. The MDA's goal is to introduce teledentistry legislation in 2023.

*What's next?* The MDA will obtain feedback from stakeholders and identify a bill sponsor to introduce our proposal. Once the bill is introduced, we'll work with members of the committee that the bill is referred to and will work with stakeholders to advance the bill to a vote.

## How you can help

The strength of the MDA's advocacy comes from our many members, especially those who engage with their legislators about the issues their practices are facing. Whether you are a practice owner, work in public health, or just received your license, you can support MDA advocacy by attending local MDA events and contacting your legislator before important votes.

You're encouraged to sign up for MDA Legislative Alerts. This system allows you to receive text alerts on important legislative issues. You can respond to your local legislator using this system by just inputting your name and address — it's just that easy, and helps greatly in advancing the MDA's legislative goals. To sign up, text MDA to 52886.

The MDA's Grassroots Advocacy Program is another great way to get involved. This program organizes in-district lunches or other get-togethers where dentists can meet informally with their state representative or senator. We've received great feedback from members who have participated in this program. To get started, email the MDA's Lynn Aronoff at [lynn@actionstrat.com](mailto:lynn@actionstrat.com) with your name, ZIP code, and contact information to hear about the next legislative event coming to your area. ●



**Advocacy leaders** — Dr. Elizabeth Ralstrom, MDA Dental PAC chair, and Dr. Jason Mashni, MDA Governmental and Insurance Affairs Committee chair, are just two of the many committed MDA advocacy volunteers..