

HB525 Review of the Board of Dentistry
Economic Affairs Interim Committee
August 23, 2011

Chairperson Berry and Honorable Committee Members,

My name is Lorrie Merrick, and I have been actively practicing dental hygiene in the state of Montana for 30 years. For the last 20 years I have served as a Board of Dentistry Liaison for the Montana Dental Hygienists' Association. As a liaison to my professional association, my main role is to attend the public or the open meeting portion of the Board of Dentistry and provide a summary report of the meeting to my association with particular emphasis on issues that affect or will impact the dental hygiene profession. My first concern that I will pose to this committee is the frustration associated with seeing the same issues resurface time and time again at the Legislative session concerning this particular board. Although I am an avid supporter of licensure and regulation for the health care professions, I am not a supporter of the conduct, behavior and manner in which this board represents or misrepresents my profession and the public. My testimony will focus on the conduct of this board with hopes that this committee will be committed to returning professionalism and integrity, which will lead to sound decisions based on law. I respectfully ask this committee to consider the following:

- Have a mandatory in-service for all board members on board etiquette, Review of Roberts Rules, and review of the purpose and mission of this board regarding how they conduct business, and what their job description entails.
- Redesign this board so that it is more equally representing professions, or finally decide to separate the professions on this board and give the professions within this board their own professional licensing board. I firmly believe if the makeup of the board remains the same, problems with this board and the professions within it will never be resolved, they will continue to get worse.
- Rename this board the Board of Dental Professionals- that the name is a reflection of the purpose of this board... which is to regulate the dental professionals in this state thus protecting the public. It has often been said in many legislative hearings that this board must remember that it is the "Board of Dentistry" not the "Board of Dentists".
- Commit to actively putting a plan into motion to resolve the ongoing problems of the board which have resurfaced at every single legislative session for the last 30 years.

In the 20 years I have served as a liaison I have witnessed the following:

- Rude behavior by the board members to the audience.
- A physical altercation of a dentist in audience with a denturist and the denturists father in the audience and the Board letting the meeting get out of control
- The only board members prepared on a regular basis for the meetings are the 2 dental hygienists and the denturist. There is a lot of information to cover in these meetings and it is the responsibility of each member to come prepared. It takes valuable time to review every issue from start to finish when members are not prepared
- Acting Chairpersons of the board- allowing dentists from the audience to speak out of turn, render an opinion, coerce an opinion or decision, and approach the board table and basically run the meeting. Not once did the chairperson at these meetings bring the meeting back to order or attempt to reestablish order even when questioned by another board member as to whether the meeting was out of order or not.
- Allowing the Administrative Staff to the Board of Dentistry to render an opinion.
- A total disregard for Roberts Rules and order of a public meeting.
- Revoting on issues when a vote was previously entered into the minutes in order to satisfy a disgruntled board member who was not present at the previous meeting to *vote*

- Destroying board minutes before they were accepted and voted on by the board
- Not providing enough information to the public members or failure to mentor public members.
- Voting based on what's best for dentistry versus what is written in statute and rule and what's best for the public
- Spending ½hr per licensure candidate discussing a "yes" answer to a question on the application regarding a misdemeanor Minor in possession charge-which I agree is necessary, yet not questioning, suspending or revoking the license of a dentist currently practicing who has been convicted of felony criminal endangerment. In addition not questioning the prudence of allowing a dentist to practice who was convicted with felony assault.
- Last but not least the gross imbalance of power on this board which leads to biased decisions based on power and discrimination.

This is only a small list of disappointing behavior by this board. I sincerely hope that this committee is seriously committed to resolving the problems surrounding this regulating body...otherwise the same problems that have been going on for the last 30 years will continue to resurface at subsequent legislative sessions. It's time for a positive change, and it's time to be done with this problem once and for all.

Respectfully submitted,


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