

Sunday's letters to the editors in Tampa Bay Times

<https://www.tampabay.com/opinion/2019/12/14/here-is-why-floridas-families-need-parental-leave/>

These kids need care

Dental care for the underserved

As a dental hygienist working in an underserved area of Hillsborough County, I see the real life impacts that our state's oral health care crisis has on individuals, including children. I work in the Suncoast Community Health Centers, Inc.'s mobile program, which provides services outside of the traditional dental clinic setting, in order to bring oral care directly to those in need, many of whom have never been to a dentist before.

While the majority of the patients I see have Medicaid or private insurance, more than half are still suffering from untreated dental disease. Many of the children I see require urgent dental care because they're suffering from the pain of an infection. But, as a hygienist, I can only provide limited preventive services, and many of those that we see are in desperate need of restorative care, in order to stop the progression of the dental disease that has already begun.

There was a point when our mobile dental program, A Smile Every Mile, was able to provide restorative care by a dentist, but the cost of staffing a dentist was ultimately prohibitive. The authorization of dental therapists in Florida would give settings like our mobile unit an additional provider who could deliver quality oral health care to our patients who need it most and have them treated before the pain of an infection lands them in the emergency room.

Our appointments are already booked out for months, and new patients join the waiting list every day; the introduction of dental therapists to programs like ours is just another tool in the toolbox that we could have to meet the needs of so many Floridians in underserved areas.

Chante Miller, Tampa

The writer works at Suncoast Community Health Centers, Inc.