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MEMBER OF CONGRESS
VERMONT, AT LARGE

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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4501

January 28, 2005

5002 FEB

Dear Vermont School Principal,

As you may know, there is a very serious lack of access to dental care affecting children across Vermont. This is obviously part of a national problem. According to the Surgeon General, tooth decay has become the single most common chronic childhood disease – five times more likely than asthma and seven times more common than hay fever. Surveys show that American children miss nearly 52 million hours of school each year because of dental problems.

I am very proud the state of Vermont has made some real progress in recent years in addressing this issue. Vermont is leading the nation in terms of establishing school-based dental clinics. The initiative began in Molly Stark Elementary School in Bennington, where over 600 Medicaid-eligible children are now registered for care at an in-school dental clinic. The idea has since spread to the Wheeler School in Burlington, which already has nearly 200 students signed up for care in its two new dental chairs. Similar programs will soon be established at Missisquoi Valley Union High School in Swanton and Mt. Anthony Union High School in Bennington.

My office has been successful in helping to establish some of these clinics and, if there is interest, we would like to pursue further federal funding in the future. While I can make no guarantees, I would appreciate hearings from principals who would be interested in this effective model for ensuring access to dental care for all students. I am enclosing an article that recently appeared in the St. Albans Messenger about the school-based medical and dental unit at Missisquoi Valley Union High School. As the article makes clear, this initiative will serve as a national model for pediatric dental care.

Importantly, such programs are available to all students on Medicaid and Dr. Dynosaur at no cost to the student's family. Also, since the capital costs would be funded by grants, the only cost to the local school system involves relatively minor administrative and facility overhead.

I hope you will let me know if you would be interested in such a project in your school and what ideas you might have for making this initiative succeed across Vermont. Please contact Michael Behan in my office (202-225-4115) to reply or if you have any questions or concerns. I look forward to working with you to ensure access to dental care for all Vermont children.

Sincerely,



Bernard Sanders
Member of Congress

✓ cc: Vermont School Superintendents

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