

Little Hoover Commission  
State of California  
925 L Street, Suite 805  
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Commissioners,

My name is Laurie James and I am the proud grandmother of two beautiful and thriving twin toddlers. My husband and I currently have legal guardianship of the twins, Colton and Kaelyn. Our daughter voluntarily gave us guardianship through the courts two months before the twins turned two. She had addiction issues and was entering a rehab program.

When going through guardianship, I was unable to get any information from Social Services until I provided the guardianship documentation from the court. That was hard in the beginning, because I had always been involved with the twins care since their birth. We all lived in our home. My daughter had Medi-Cal through her pregnancy and beyond, therefore the children automatically had Medi-Cal. My husband and I had always had military coverage and later Kaiser through my husband's employer. We had no idea what was available for our grandchildren.

At the local Social Services office there were no pamphlets that addressed dental coverage. There was no information of when a child should see a dentist. I had no idea if Medi-Cal covered dental and I certainly had never heard of Denti-Cal. There was a lack of readily available resources. Nor was there any information at places like WIC that told you how to navigate finding a dental home.

I was fortunate enough to have a friend, Donna Jackson, who worked in Public Health who helped walk me through the dental world for children in this Managed Medi-Cal world. When I took over the guardianship of the children, and my daughter went into rehab, I wanted to make sure they were up to date with all their health care needs. At the local pediatric office at Sutter Medical Foundation, they received fluoride varnishing and still continue receiving those services. But, the doctor never mentioned that they also needed a dental home.

It was Donna Jackson, who is also the local CHDP representative that asked me who was the twin's dental provider. I told her "I don't know, where do I start?" Not only did she locate a child-friendly dental office who accepted Denti-Cal, she also printed out the application and helped facilitate the scheduling of their first appointment.

That was a very stressful time in our lives. I had no idea if there were any dentists in Amador County where we live. It just so happens that there are no pediatric dentists in our rural area who accept Medi-Cal (which later I discovered was actually Denti-Cal).

Donna helped find a dentist who was so patient and kind with the children. He helped educate me on dental care for the twins, how to hold them to brush their teeth, and how to talk to them. There was a friendly and helpful staff, and the office environment was amazing. The children were not frightened at all, which was a fear of mine.

One of the biggest problems we were having at the time was with the twin's pacifiers. They were like security blankets for them. I knew it was not good for their teeth, but they were not about to give them up. The dentist suggested cutting the nipples of the pacifier a little bit at a time. We had tried for months to take away the pacifiers with no success. Within a few weeks, the pacifiers were gone. It was such a simple solution. It was literally a miracle. I was so grateful to the dentist.

Unfortunately, I had received a letter last November that the dental office would no longer be accepting the insurance as of December 31st. I was devastated. Now what was I going to do? Fortunately, the children had appointments scheduled for mid-December. I contemplated paying for dental coverage offered by the dental office called Dentegra. Apparently some of their Denti-Cal patients were purchasing the coverage out of pocket. But, we had twins. We were covering their day to day care and paying for our daughter's rehab costs. I had to go down to one day a week at my job to take care of the children. I looked at the costs and simply could not afford it.

I didn't understand why Denti-Cal did not notify us that this dentist would no longer be accepting Medi-Cal patients and send us a list of who does. I guess that is the insured's problem, but remember...the insured are twin toddlers with a mother in recovery and grandparents who have never use state-funded benefits. No one puts a face to the issue!

So, I immediately contacted Donna at Public Health again and shared the letter from the dental office with her. She told me not to worry and that we would start the process of looking for a new dental provider. The children are not due for their next dental visit until June, but Donna suggested we start the process now. So, that means another registration form, another new office, and the unknown of how this new dentist will be with the children.

Since the children first started with their dentist, my grandson Colton has been diagnosed with Chronic Neutropenia. He cannot be around a lot of other people due to his very low count of white blood cells. He needs to have his appointments scheduled differently. And there is the fact that I have two children who need dental care at the same time. Just double everything. The dental office I was going to worked around these special needs. I'm not sure if every dental office will be as accommodating.

I am very grateful that there is Denti-Cal in place for children. I just really wish there were more dental providers who care for children. I also wish there was more educational material available to help families maneuver through the process.

I appreciate the opportunity to tell my story. I hope that it will help other families. I want to thank the Little Hoover Commission for reaching out to our small rural community. My hope is that one day there will be a seamless process of communication to help families navigate through the system. I am happy to report our daughter has completed her recovery program and is petitioning the court to gain back guardianship. She has taken an active part in the parenting of the twins and is doing amazingly well!

Sincerely,

Laurie James

