

Dear Central Florida District Dental Association,



On January 26, 2026, I had the distinct pleasure of attending Florida's annual Dentist's Day on the Hill in Tallahassee as a Howard Pranikoff Scholar. I participated not only as a scholarship recipient, but also as a current orthodontic resident at the University of Florida.

Spending nearly two days focused on advocacy was both inspiring and eye-opening. I experienced a wide range of emotions, including excitement, disappointment, and hope. I felt excitement at the opportunity to visit Tallahassee for the first time and walk the historic halls of our state capitol—an experience that underscored the significance of civic engagement. I also felt disappointment that issues such as the expansion of the FRAME loan repayment program and insurance downcoding even required debate among lawmakers.

However, this realization reinforced how critical it is for our voices to be heard. Many legislators do not fully understand the realities faced by dental professionals, and it is our responsibility to educate them. Ultimately, I felt a deep sense of hope. By sharing patient scenarios and personal experiences, we put faces to policies and humanized the legislation being considered, reminding lawmakers who is directly impacted by their votes.

Through this experience, I gained a profound appreciation for grassroots advocacy efforts led by organizations such as CFDDA. The dentists advocating alongside me were full-time practitioners who stepped away from their patients and practices to stand up for what they believe in. Their dedication was inspiring. I believe that organizational support for member participation is vital, as attending Dentist's Day on the Hill even once can ignite a lasting commitment to advocacy. I am a firm believer that change cannot occur without speaking up. While not all policies moved in our favor, I am confident that our discussions encouraged lawmakers to reflect—and perhaps even pause—before voting against our agenda.

This experience has strengthened my resolve to advocate for both my patients and my colleagues. Legislators often lack insight into the daily challenges of practicing dentistry and the extent to which insurance companies exploit our profession. These

conversations must continue if meaningful change occurs. While my past efforts to make a difference have largely focused on community service and youth mentorship, this experience has opened my eyes to the importance of advocacy at the highest levels of government, where policy decisions can create widespread and lasting impact.

This scholarship provided me the opportunity to step back from the demands of residency and reflect on our responsibility to advocate for our profession and our patients. Many attendees of Dentist's Day on the Hill have participated for years—some for decades. Their long-standing commitment is a testament to the importance of this work, and I truly believe their efforts have helped make my education possible. I therefore feel a responsibility to carry that momentum forward and to continue advocating for future dentists, just as they once advocated for me.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a difference.

Sincerely,

Tyler James, DMD

