



By: Ronda V. Lane, BS, CDA, RDA, FADAA

The 85th Regular Legislative Session will be over soon. Senate Bill 313 (SB313), which affects dental assistants, was filed on March 6, 2017. TDAA closely monitored the bill and proactively mailed letters to all nine Senate Committee on Health and Human Services members and all eleven House Committee on Public Health members in early February. In addition the TDAA invited the Texas State Board of Dental Examiners (TSBDE) executive director to speak at the TDAA General Assembly in May.

On March 20, 2017, I, as TDAA Legislative chair, attended and gave public testimony against SB313. The original bill recommended combining all dental assistant certificates (radiology, coronal polishing, pit and fissure sealants, nitrous oxide monitoring) with the stipulation that a dental assistant must hold all four certificates before any one of these functions could be performed. A substitution SB313 was filed after all public testimony was heard in the Senate Committee meeting. The substitution bill progressed through the Senate and moved on to the House Public Health Committee where it also passed. The full House passed the bill with a minor amendment and the Senate concurred with the House. On May 24th, 2017 the bill was sent to the Governor for signature. When the Governor signs the bill, it will become law on September 1, 2018.

TDAA was not able to persuade the legislators to appoint a dental assistant to the Board when the composition of Board members was addressed; however the bill does create a Dental Review Committee (with terms of 6 years) that will include a registered dental assistant member along with six dentists and two dental hygienists. All of these members will be appointed by the Governor by December 1, 2017.

Unfortunately, the bill discontinued the pit and fissure sealant and the coronal polishing certificates for dental assistants. Texas State Board of Dental Examiners (TSBDE) could adopt and enforce rules requiring a dental assistant to register with the board to perform other dental acts as necessary to protect the public health and safety. TSBDE would be required to develop a system to track the demographics of registrants and coordinate renewal dates. Another possible change is that a registration could be valid for two years and be renewed by paying, most probably, a higher fee. In prior years, an inexperienced dental assistant could train under the employing dentist and take X-rays for only that 1st year as part of the training, but this bill specifically requires a dental assistant to be registered before making a dental X-ray or monitoring the administration of nitrous oxide. Starting September 1, 2018, TSBDE would be required to issue dental X-ray or nitrous oxide monitoring registrations to a dental assistant who held a current registration issued by TSBDE before that date as long as the dental assistant also met the relevant continuing education requirements. The TSBDE shall establish the minimum number of hours of continuing education required to renew a registration. Nitrous oxide and X-ray certificates issued under previous law would expire on September 1, 2019.