

Hello All- As we start this new year, my hope is that we can find ways to work together for the common good.

AAO legislative priorities include helping protect staff, patients and small businesses from COVID-19, protecting patients from risk of direct-to-consumer treatment, easing the burden of student debt and improving healthcare policy.

COGA held its meeting virtually on February 22 and we reviewed the many legislative issues the AAO has been working on over the last year both statewide and federally. In our own constituency, the AAO successfully helped to defeat a bill in Ohio that would have allowed orthodontic treatment entirely via tele-dentistry and is currently working with the Ohio Dental Association on future legislation.

For over 20 years, the ADA and the AAO have advocated for the repeal of the McCarran-Ferguson Act which gave a federal antitrust exemption for health insurance companies. The Competitive Health Insurance Reform Act of 2020 removing the federal exemption was signed into law on December 22nd. This was a big win and hard fought against the insurance industry. Supporters hope this will stop insurers from price fixing and paying subpar reimbursements.

The first ever virtual Professional Advocacy Conference just occurred on February 23rd with 89 participants. Members from the AAO's federal lobbying firm, **Cozen O'Connor Public Strategies**, provided an overview of the political landscape of Washington, D.C., the new Congress, and what to expect from the Biden Administration. After the Cozen O'Connor update, we were joined by special guest **Representative Ann Wagner (MO-2)**. Congresswoman Wagner has been a cosponsor of the RAISE Health Benefit Act, legislation that would allow families to better manage rising healthcare costs while also allowing them to save for future medical expenses. The following day, instead of "Hill" visits where we, AAO members and residents, typically meet in small numbers with legislator staff/congress members, we had zoom meetings over lunch hours with members of Congress, members of our lobbying group and our general council in charge of advocacy, Trey Lawrence. Participants had a chance to ask questions and hear directly from members of congress. There was a lot less leg work running between House and Senate offices and more zoom meetings, but we had more time talk to congress members. The Professional Advocacy Conference is a lot more interesting than it may sound. Once you attend a conference, you begin to see how the government works and why you need to participate in the process to support what you feel is important and at least not get run over by others who feel their agenda is more important than yours.

The AAO is piloting a new program in California called Advocacy Ambassadors where a handful of members are identified from the state who can be called upon to help with legislative issues in that state pertaining to orthodontists. More to come on this subject.

Respectfully submitted,

Valerie Martone