



Cleft Lip and Palate Coverage

*An Act to Include Treatment for Children with Cleft Lip and Palate
in All Health Insurance Coverage in the Commonwealth*

Lead Sponsor: Representative Louis Kafka

H932

Proposal

To require medical, **dental, surgical, speech, audiologic**, and **nutritional** services be included in **health insurance** plans for children born with cleft lip and/or palate.

Background

- ❖ Cleft lip and palate is a birth defect that affects the alignment and amount of bone, soft tissue, and teeth in the oral cavity. Abnormal lip and palatal tissue significantly affects breathing, feeding, speech, socialization and quality of life.
- ❖ The type and sequence of surgical, dental, medical, speech, and hearing treatments for cleft lip and palate is dependent on the stage of behavioral and physical development: infancy, childhood, adolescence, and the completion of facial growth.
- ❖ Multiple surgeries and long-term follow-up are often necessary, throughout normal development and adulthood. Since clefts interfere with physical, psychological, and language development, treatment must start as early as possible.
- ❖ Lack of access to time-based comprehensive care causes unnecessary pain and suffering, and can only be partially compensated for in adulthood by more costly, more invasive, and less effective treatments.

A “cleft” means a split or separation; the palate is the “roof” of the mouth. A cleft palate or lip then is a split in the oral (mouth) structure. Physicians call clefting a “craniofacial anomaly.”

- *A child can be born with both a cleft lip and cleft palate or either condition alone.*
- *Oral clefts are one of the most common birth defects. One in 800 babies are born with cleft lip/palate. One in 2,000 babies are born with an isolated cleft palate.*
- *Fortunately, modern medical and dental care can restore a child’s oral cavity, and prevent harmful medical and psychosocial effects.*

Specifics

Dental benefits, including preventive, orthodontic and prosthodontic treatments, are ***not*** currently included in health insurance plans for children born with cleft lip and/or palate. Dental health and tooth alignment are critical components of surgical treatment planning and medical care, and thereby must be included in health insurance benefits. This bill would require that plans offered to children born with cleft lip and/or palate include comprehensive restorative dental, medical, surgical, and speech benefits.

For more information on *An Act to Include Treatment for Children with Cleft Lip and Palate* please contact Representative Kafka’s office at 617-722-2960