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Contact: Sydney Boardman  
Phone: 603.558.8673  
Email: sydney@junapr.com

**Vermont State Dental Society, University of Detroit Mercy, Sanders, and Welch Announce Historic Effort to Advance Dental Care and Education Across State**

*Vermont State Dental Society and University of Detroit Mercy Partner to Bring Innovative Dental Health Education Center to Vermont*

**Burlington, VT (September 20, 2024)** — The Vermont State Dental Society (VSDS), University of Detroit Mercy (UDM), Senator Bernie Sanders, and Senator Peter Welch are partnering to bring an innovative Dental Oral Health Education Center to Vermont in Fall 2027. This new dental clinic and education program would bring UDM students to Vermont to complete their final years of training – strengthening the dental care provider pipeline and expanding access to much-needed care across the state.

At a press conference on Friday, VSDS, UDM, Sanders, and Welch celebrated the program receiving its accreditation from the Commission of Dental Accreditation (CODA) – an essential step in establishing the teaching program in Vermont.

Sanders and Welch are working to secure \$4.6 million in federal funding through the FY25 Congressionally Directed Spending process to support this historic initiative. The funding was recently approved by the Appropriations Committee and needs to be passed by the House and the Senate before being signed into law by President Biden.

“By partnering with University of Detroit Mercy, we are opening doors to educational opportunities that haven’t existed before in Vermont, and increasing access to oral healthcare for Vermonters as well,” said Justin Hurlburt DMD, board president of the Vermont State Dental Society. “We are excited to partner with Detroit Mercy on this opportunity to expand the dentistry workforce in the state,” he added.

“University of Detroit Mercy School of Dentistry has a long tradition of graduating practice-ready clinicians and it is an honor to help bring the Detroit Mercy DDS program to the Green Mountain State,” said Mert N. Aksu DDS, JD, MHSA, Cert DPH dean of Detroit Mercy Dental. “UDM recognizes the need for dentists in Vermont, and looks forward to providing a program to educate and graduate dentists in the state.”

“The suffering that the dental care crisis causes Vermonters and people across this country too often goes unseen and unaddressed,” said Sen. Sanders. “Far too many, especially in rural areas like Vermont, do not have access to a dentist, which forces them to either travel long distances or go without the care they need. In some Vermont counties, there is a year-long waitlist. In others, there are no dentists at all who treat kids with Medicaid. And because we don’t have a dental school in the state, there’s no natural

pipeline for dentists to train and eventually work in our communities. It is time for that to change. This historic initiative brings me a lot of hope for the care and education opportunities we can deliver to Vermont. I am proud to partner with the Vermont Dental Society, University of Detroit Mercy, and Senator Welch to make this a reality. Let's get it done."

"This accreditation is an important step forward in the process to expand access to dentists here in Vermont, so every patient can get the care they need. I look forward to working with Senator Sanders on this important issue, and will continue to advocate for more federal funding to support workforce development in dentistry and health care across our state," said Sen. Welch.

University of Detroit Mercy-Vermont will increase oral health education opportunities and address the statewide dental provider shortage. The tentative location for the new center will be in Chittenden County.

VSIDS, a nonprofit professional healthcare organization whose mission is to improve the oral health of Vermonters and to serve the profession of dentistry in the state, is pioneering the new institution with UDM as it brings more than 90 years of experience in educating dentists worldwide.

Beginning in the fall of 2025, the partnership between VSIDS and UDM will include two years of foundational and preclinical education at the UDM School of Dentistry Campus in Detroit, Michigan, followed by two years of clinical and didactic education at a new dental clinic based in Colchester. The University of Detroit Mercy-Vermont dental program will offer DDS dental education in the state of Vermont, accredited by the Commission of Dental Accreditation (CODA).

University of Detroit Mercy-Vermont will house modern classrooms with on-site clinics to support its clinical education program and serve as a public health Medicaid clinic to provide dental care to qualifying individuals. Extending its reach beyond its Colchester facility, the new dental program will partner with clinical organizations in Vermont to reach areas with a shortage of dental health professionals and underserved populations.

To learn more about University of Detroit Mercy-Vermont, please visit {insert VSIDS web landing page}.

#### **About Vermont State Dental Society (VSIDS):**

As Vermont's professional association for dentists, the VSIDS works diligently to enhance the oral healthcare environment in the state. With just under 400 members, VSIDS includes more than 80% of the state's practicing dentists. VSIDS provides resources, educational information, and support for its members and the public and advocates for public policies and systems to improve oral healthcare for all Vermonters.

#### **About University of Detroit Mercy**

University of Detroit Mercy is Michigan's largest and most comprehensive independent Catholic university, sponsored by the Sisters of Mercy of the Americas and the Society of Jesus (the

Jesuits). Today's University boasts the heritage of two founding institutions: the University of Detroit, founded in 1877 by the Jesuits, and Mercy College of Detroit, founded by the Sisters of Mercy in 1941. The two consolidated as University of Detroit Mercy in 1990. Detroit Mercy offers more than 100 undergraduate, graduate and professional academic degrees and programs through seven schools and colleges. Detroit Mercy educates the whole person, focusing on the value of excellent academics, service to the community and a deeper spirituality to prepare graduates to live lives of purpose and conscience. For more information, please visit [www.udmercy.edu](http://www.udmercy.edu).

University of Detroit Mercy School of Dentistry creates, cultivates, and sustains a community of dedicated healthcare professionals committed to excellent patient care and community wellness through evidence-based scholarly activity, research, teaching, and service in an inclusive environment.