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### American Dental Association Statement on the Death of Deamonte Driver

CHICAGO, March 2, 2007—We are deeply saddened at the apparently avoidable death of 12-year-old Deamonte Driver, Prince George's County, Md., from a severe brain infection that may have resulted from his deplorable degree of untreated dental disease. This is an extreme example of what then-Surgeon General David Satcher called a "silent epidemic" of untreated oral disease in his landmark report on oral health in 2000.

Deamonte's death should be a wake-up call to the nation. It is a national disgrace that in the 21st Century America, millions of children don't have access to basic preventive and restorative dental care. Thousands of these kids suffer from profound dental disease—they can't eat or sleep properly, can't pay attention in school because they're suffering from chronic infections and the resulting constant pain that could have been prevented and easily relieved through treatment.

Former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop once said that if you don't have good oral health, you aren't healthy. Increasingly, science is bearing this out. Good oral health isn't just about teeth and gums. It's about overall health, about preventing and controlling non-oral diseases, about learning and development, self-esteem and employability. And it's everyone's business, not just dentists'.

It's time for action to prevent the next child's needless death; to end society's neglect of the oral health of the most vulnerable among us. Dentists can lead the way, but we can't do this alone. We need state and federal public officials to stop shortchanging dental programs, which costs all of us heavily in the long run. We need water fluoridation and the universal availability of preventive care, both of which are surefire investments that produce healthier, more productive young people. And we need to educate all parents about taking care of their children's oral health.

It's too late for Deamonte Driver. We as a nation owe it to our children to fix the system that let him down.

#### About the American Dental Association

The not-for-profit ADA is the nation's largest dental association, representing more than 155,000 dentist members. The premier source of oral health information, the ADA has advocated for the public's health and promoted the art and science of dentistry since 1859. The ADA's state-of-the-art research facilities develop and test dental products and materials that have advanced the practice of dentistry and made the patient experience more positive. The ADA Seal of Acceptance long has been a valuable and respected guide to consumer and professional products. <http://www.ada.org>

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