



## **Kool Smiles Joins Governor O'Malley to Announce New *Healthy Smiles Tour***

*New Public/ Private Partnership Opens Access to Quality Oral Care for Underserved Children*

**(Seat Pleasant, Maryland, September 8)- Kool Smiles**, a leading dental health network focused on providing oral care to underserved children and adults, proudly joined Governor Martin O'Malley, the Deamonte Driver Dental Project and other network dental providers today to announce the *Governor O'Malley's Healthy Smiles Tour*, a new statewide initiative designed to promote positive oral health and hygiene among Maryland's children.

"Providing kids with a dental home, regardless of parents' income or socio-economic status, is Kool Smiles' number one priority," stated **Dr. Ashley Nichols of Kool Smiles**, who joined Governor O'Malley in announcing the new public/private partnership today. "We are therefore honored and excited to be part of Governor O'Malley efforts to decrease the hurdles of access to quality oral care. We have great expectations for this new public/private partnership and applaud the governor for his efforts to ensure that every child in the state of Maryland has access to quality dental care."

Governor O'Malley has spearheaded initiatives to increase access to dental care for Maryland's children in the wake of the death of Deamonte Driver. Driver, who was on Medicaid, passed away due to complications stemming from a toothache. His mother had difficulty finding a dentist to see him and his brother.

"Together, we have resolved to do everything within our power to prevent avoidable tragedies like the loss of Deamonte Driver, who passed away when an untreated toothache last year," said Governor O'Malley. "That's why today, we're announcing the kick off of the 'Healthy Smiles' dental tour to promote awareness and highlight the importance of children's dental health. With partners like the Deamonte Driver Dental Project and Kool Smiles, we can make oral health services available to Medicaid-eligible and uninsured children in Prince George's County and throughout the region; and reach out to kids just like Deamonte, ensuring that they will not be turned away from routine but potentially life-saving care."

Also in attendance was Congressman Elijah Cummings, who commented "I am pleased to join Governor O'Malley to kick off the Healthy Smiles dental tour. Deamonte Driver's story is a shocking wake up call highlighting the failures of our health care system, and we must continue moving forward on all fronts to ensure that from this tragic death we are able to bring life," Congressman Cummings said. "In order to truly effect change, we must work together to reach the goal of providing all children access to quality dental care."

The state of oral health among American children is alarming, as noted by the U.S. Surgeon General who called oral care the number one unmet health need in children. Dental caries (tooth decay) is the single most common childhood disease – 5 times more common than asthma and 7 times more common than hay fever. Over 50 percent of 5- to 9-year-old children have at least one cavity or filling, and that proportion increases to 78 percent among 17-year-olds.

Following the Governor's initiatives to improve access, Kool Smiles opened 3 offices in Maryland, two in Baltimore and one in District Heights.

In an effort to help promote better oral health in Maryland's children, Governor Martin O'Malley has initiated a statewide initiative, which will educate children and their parents about the importance of maintaining their oral health, including obtaining a quality dental care home.

Kool Smiles, whose mission is to expand access to quality dental care for underserved communities, helped Governor O'Malley kick off the *Healthy Smiles Tour* at Seat Pleasant Elementary School, in Prince George's County. During the event, Kool Smiles also provided free dental screenings to Seat Pleasant students.

For more information about Kool Smiles, please visit [www.koolsmilespc.com](http://www.koolsmilespc.com)

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#### **About Kool Smiles**

Founded in 2002, Kool Smiles is a network of local dental offices dedicated to expanding access to quality dental care for children and families in underserved communities. Kool Smiles provides preventative care, diagnostic imaging and a full range of restorative care supported with electronic health records. Kool Smiles offices, many of which are newly constructed, are designed to facilitate communications between our patients and doctors in a relaxed atmosphere. In addition to accepting most insurance plans, Kool Smiles is proud to offer services to families covered by Medicaid and State Children's Health Insurance Programs (CHIP). Kool Smiles also provides oral health education programs through partnerships with community schools and organizations. To find a local Kool Smiles dentist, please visit [www.koolsmilespc.com](http://www.koolsmilespc.com).