

MIDWESTERN SOCIETY OF ORTHODONTISTS

TOP 10 TAKEAWAY'S

Spring 2026

Ad Interim AAO Advocacy Conference Leadership Development Conference

1. Dr. Emily Willett, MSO President, presided over the 2026 MSO Ad Interim meeting held earlier this month at the AAO Headquarters in St. Louis.

Pictured below (back row left to right): Dr. Mike Durbin, MSO Trustee; Dr. John Kittleson, Wisconsin Director; Dr. Emerson Ellis, North Dakota Director; Dr. John Firth, Missouri Director; Dr. Clayton Parks, Iowa Director; Dr. Dennis Sommers, Alt. Delegate; Dr. Spencer Pope, Delegate; Dr. Michael LaFerla, Alt. Delegate; (front row left to right): Dr. Emily Willett, President; Dr. Keri Barrow, South Dakota Director, Dr. Heather Horton, Minnesota Director; Dr. Nellie Kim-Weroha, MSO Trustee-Elect; Dr. Melissa Bernhardt, Secretary-Treasurer; Dr. Estee Wang, President-Elect; Dr. Jenna Walburn, Delegate; Dr. Jahnvi Rao, Delegate Vice Chair; Dr. Bronwen Richards, Illinois Director; Gwen Berlekamp, Executive Director. Not pictured: Dr. Katherine Kazak, Manitoba Director; and Dr. Katherine Higgins, Nebraska Director.



2. Dr. Willett, Delegation Chair, reviewed all the resolutions received to date that will go before the House of Delegates (HOD) at the AAO Annual Session in Orlando, April 30 – May 3.

In addition to Willett, the MSO delegation includes Vice Chair Dr. Jahnvi Rao, Dr. Spencer Pope, Dr. Jenna Walburn, Dr. Bronwen Richards, Dr. John Kittleson, Dr. Melissa Bernhardt, and Alternate Delegates are Dr. Dennis Sommers and Dr. Michael LaFerla.



3. During the meeting, the MSO Board received updates from several AAO staff members on current initiatives, as well as a report from the AAO Foundation. AAOF Vice President Brett Schott and AAOF President-Elect—and MSO member—Dr. James Klarsch joined the meeting to share progress on the *For the Future* campaign, which supports orthodontic faculty through scholarships that help supplement their salaries.

In support of this important initiative, the MSO Board has made a pledge to the campaign. MSO President Dr. Willett presented the first of three annual contributions during the meeting. Pictured with Dr. Willett are Dr. James Klarsch, AAOF President-Elect and MSO member, and AAOF Vice President Brett Schott.



preparing to assume the position of 2026–2027 AAO President at the Annual Session this spring in Orlando.

Since beginning his service as Trustee in 2017, Dr. Durbin has been a dedicated advocate for the MSO and a steadfast leader within the AAO. His commitment to the organization and the orthodontic profession has been both consistent and impactful.

The MSO Board extends its sincere gratitude to Dr. Durbin for his years of service, leadership, and unwavering support.

4. The Ad Interim meeting marked Dr. Mike Durbin's final MSO meeting in his role as Trustee to the AAO Board of Trustees, as he



5. The AAO Advocacy Conference was held last week in Washington and a delegation from the MSO was on hand to support the effort by going to Capitol Hill to visit legislators. This year the priorities included:

- **Small Business Challenges** – preventing federal overregulation of small businesses and orthodontic offices, addressing workforce needs and solutions; and integrating the responsible use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in orthodontic clinical practice.
- **Federal Teledentistry Legislation** – Ensuring safe, effective, high-quality orthodontic care for all patients while protecting them from the risks of mail-order orthodontic treatment models.

- **Student Loan Debt Challenges** – The average student loan debt for an orthodontic resident is \$567,000; new student loan caps beginning July 1, 2026, may not fully cover the cost of orthodontic residency, increasing reliance on private loans and creating new barriers for prospective residents.
- **Expanding Access to Care** – Working with Congress to expand health care savings vehicles for consumers; seeking congressional champions for the Ensuring Lasting Smiles Act; and working to improve oral health care literacy.



More facts!

OrthoFacts.org

Click on the QR code to learn more about AAO’s advocacy initiatives.

6. The MSO contingent to the AAO Advocacy Conference included (back row left to right) Dr. Cody Phen, Dr. Jason Jeon, Dr. Elias Witte, Dr. Mike Durbin, and MSO Executive Director Gwen Berlekamp. Front row (left to right): Dr. Stephanie Price, Dr. Nellie Kim-Weroha, Dr. Manal Ibrahim LaVacca, and Dr. Deb Lien.



7. To get involved in AAO’s advocacy efforts, consider getting involved with the National Advocacy Network (NAN) which ensures the AAO has structure and local insights for grassroots advocacy across the country. To learn more, visit [AAO National Advocacy Network](#).

8. The AAOPAC Board met prior to the conference. Pictured left are Dr. Deb Lien, Immediate Past Chair, with Dr. Ed Davis, current Chair PAC Board.



AAOPAC contributions for 2025 totaled \$454,942.60 and came from 839 members. The 2026 PAC goal is \$460,000.

Please consider donating so that we may reach our 2026 goal.

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9. The AAO Leadership Development Conference was held January 21-23 in Phoenix. Attending for the MSO (from left to right): Dr. Mike Durbin (MSO Trustee), Dr. Mallory Kocher (IL), Dr. Jackie Kostelac (IL), Dr. Estee Wang (MN) and MSO President-Elect, Dr. Andrew Clark (IL), Dr. Samim Taraji (IL), Dr. Anthony Fisher (ND), and MSO Executive Director Gwen Berlekamp.



10. **Save The Date** for the 2026 MSO Annual Session this October in Nashville. MSO will be joining SSO for the Annual Session for both constituents. Registration coming in April!

