

Sass Linneken
Skowhegan

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: my name is Sass Linneken, I live in Skowhegan and I am here today to testify in favor of LD 996.

The Committee on Health and Human Services has voted unanimously in support of legislation that would require MaineCare to cover dental services for adults, but Governor Mills has thus far refused to sign that legislation. It is so important we keep pushing.

Growing up in poverty and experiencing chronic homelessness from ages 16 to 23, I know the impacts of inadequate dental coverage. Due to loss of dental coverage while I was homeless, I ended up stuck wearing my top braces for five years, and my bottoms for seven. This sustained dental neglect resulted in chronic gum infections that eventually led to an antibiotic-induced intestinal infection that almost killed me, and resulted in thousands in medical bills due to a four-day hospital stay.

I am 42 years old today and I now have nearly no natural teeth left. At 39 years old I was forced to put nearly \$6000 on credit to have the teeth ruining my health extracted and replaced by partial dentures. This has deeply impacted my life, though it needs to be noted that having access to credit is a privilege I didn't even gain until my late 30's, because when you're poor there's a huge barrier to getting credit.

As a result of this borrowing, my bills became so high I faced needing to file for bankruptcy a year after losing my teeth, and was only saved by doing so because at the last minute I received a raise that **just** covered the minimum payments due on my credit debt. If I were to lose my current job, I would absolutely need to file for bankruptcy because of that borrowing.

I've pulled myself from poverty into the working class, and these are the real and very lasting impacts to not having access to dental care. People in poverty are already under the stress of having basic needs unmet like food, housing, heat, transportation, childcare, and more. And those who've been lucky enough to pull out of that struggle to meeting just those basic needs, like I have, will inevitably continue to be pulled backward by the implications of the medical neglect that results by not having their very real dental health needs met.

Teeth are important, they shouldn't be considered luxury bones only fitting for those who can afford them. I saw them referred to that way recently in reference to how employers and health insurance companies seem to see them. I thought it was pretty fitting to include here since we still aren't covering dental care for low-income adults in Maine.

Please pass LD 996 to show people who are struggling in our state that they matter to you and are every bit as deserving of dignity as anyone else.

Thanks for listening.

Respectfully,
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