



February 22nd 2023

LD 258: An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2023, June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025.

Senator Rotundo, Senator Baldacci, Representative Sachs, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services Committees, my name is Lyvia Gaewsky and I am the Program Manager for the statewide From the First Tooth program. I am testifying today to encourage the Committees to add the necessary funding into the budget to ensure Maine CDC's School Oral Health Program has the resources to expand to all schools by 2025, as enacted last legislative session.

From the First Tooth is a statewide children's oral health program funded by the Children's Oral Health Network of Maine. For the last 14 years, From the First Tooth has worked to increase access to preventive oral health care by integrating oral health evaluations and fluoride varnish application into the pediatric primary care settings for children in Maine.

Early childhood caries is the most widespread, chronic disease among children in the United States. The consequences of untreated tooth decay includes pain, infection, impaired speech, delays in learning, toothaches and facial abscesses that can become so acute that care is sought in hospital emergency departments. Avoidable oral health related emergency room visits are not only wasteful and costly to the healthcare system, but also rarely addresses the true problem, as few emergency departments deliver comprehensive dental services.

School-based oral health programs increase access and serve as an early intervention to prevent the need for expensive, last-minute triage care. Providing health services for



children in schools, where they spend the vast majority of their waking hours, is a proven public health success story and is practical and fiscally responsible.

On a personal note, I have two close friends who are currently elementary teachers in Maine. One is a second grade teacher serving a school in Hancock County. My friend recalls a student coming up to her in the middle of the day's lesson and saying they were unable to concentrate due to a toothache. Without other options, she sent the child to the nurse's office for pain relief, which typically includes an ice pack applied to the face. The next week, again during the middle of a lesson, the same child approached my friend and said they are unable to concentrate due to dental pain.

The second friend is an elementary school teacher who teaches students with severe intellectual and development disabilities in Cumberland County. Recently, she shared with me that many of her students struggle to find routine dental care resulting the need for sedation to treat escalated dental disease. Expanding school-based oral health programs to provide early, often and appropriate preventive care can break cycles and improve the overall health and wellness of children in Maine.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony on this important issue.

On behalf of From the First Tooth,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lyvia Gaewsky". The signature is stylized with a large, looped initial "L" and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Lyvia Gaewsky

From the First Tooth, Program Manager