

Testimony of Teresa Alley, Oral Health Coordinator, Washington County Children’s Program for 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.

Before the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee and the Health and Human Services Committee

Public Hearing: February 22, 2022

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 Teresa Alley and I am a dental hygienist employed in Washington County for almost 36 years. In my vast experience, children living in Washington County are experiencing the greatest barrier to oral health services than ever before. Several of the community health centers who serve the largest number of individuals enrolled in MaineCare are without a dental provider to care for our residents. Several of the health centers are experiencing a nine-month waiting period to see a dental provider. Personally, I know too many children who go to bed each night with tooth aches.

I’m 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. Since 1999, I have served almost 1000 students each year enrolled at Washington County elementary schools. It is common for children to tell me they are unable to go to the dentist and that their parents know they are in pain. Recently one such child said “Mom will take me to the dentist after we have our roof fixed”. Frequently children report they don’t have their own toothbrush or toothpaste. It seems to me only the lucky child is able to access restorative care once our school-based preventive measures aren’t enough to keep children without unsightly, painful decayed teeth. Dental disease affects the child’s ability to speak, their self-esteem, and ability to concentrate and learn while in school. Routinely we are the only dental provider to see them. Families in our County have come to depend on our services.

I continue to observe the positive impacts the school-based oral health program has for our County. With preventive measures alone, the decay rate for children reduced from 35% to as low as 23%. The strength of our program is that we serve children within the school. Therefore, parents do not need to take time off from work to bring them to a dental office. The transportation barrier is also eliminated as we travel to each school. Our policy is not to charge any family any out of pocket costs. Hence, we rely deeply on this funding source as our core programming costs. We have multiple funding streams in an addition to our Maine CDC contract which accounts for a third of our budget. This core funding allows us to leverage twice the amount of funding we receive from the State and supplement our budget costs with the generosity of private foundation awards. Historically, the reimbursement we receive from MaineCare is approximately \$10,000 annually.

It is very important that we fund the expansion of this critical program. Thank you for your consideration of my testimony on this important issue.