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Dear Members of the Maine Legislature - Education & Cultural Affairs Committee

I am writing to you today on behalf of the National Coalition of Dentists for Health Equity (NCDHE) to again congratulate the Maine legislature for its inciteful passage of the bill nearly 10 years ago that recognized and established dental therapists as a high quality, safe and cost-effective addition to Maine's dental care team. The dental therapist model has been demonstrated to improve equity and reduce disparities in oral health. Passage of the legislation recognized the significant barriers to oral care that exist for certain segments of Maine's population and the success of the dental therapist model. NCDHE is now encouraging the legislature to approve LD 1026 DT Education.

NCDHE membership includes highly respected members of the dental profession, including 7 past dental school deans, two past chief dental officers of the United States Public Health Service, the chief editor of the surgeon general's report on oral health and 2 past presidents of the American Public Health Association. While other organizations of dentists address a multitude of issues, NCDHE is the only professional organization of dentists solely dedicated to the principle of equity and justice in oral health. We rely on the evidence before making any recommendations. There is sound evidence that where dental therapists are practicing, more children are receiving dental disease prevention, less general anesthesia is necessary, fewer extractions are needed, waiting times for appointments have been shortened and transportation barriers have been decreased. There are 14 states, including Maine which have passed legislation and are at various stages of implementation or education and training program development.

There continues to be a growing body of evidence that supports the relationship of oral health and general health and well-being. Studies have shown that poor oral health can be associated with increased risks of diabetes, heart disease, poor pregnancy outcomes and others. Late detection of precancerous and cancerous lesions in the oral cavity can have devastating results, including death. Yet by increasing the reach of dentists with dental therapists, these risks can be reduced.

The National Coalition of Dentists for Health Equity is a national organization of accomplished dentists dedicated to assuring that everyone has an equitable opportunity to access high quality, affordable dental care.

Passing a dental therapist bill is only the beginning of the process. Once a bill is passed, a training and education program becomes critical to advancing the model. Although Maine has reciprocity for dental therapists educated in other states, most states want to hold on to the small number of dental therapists being trained in this early stage of the dental therapist profession. They are not enthusiastic about training folks in their state to address their problems and then see those folks move on to another state. In fact, one of the advantages of the dental therapy model is that candidates can be recruited from their own communities of need and return to their own communities. All this leads to the conclusion that Maine needs a dental therapist education and training program if it is to maximize the benefit of the dental therapist model.

For the above stated reasons, the National Coalition of Dentists for Health Equity strongly encourages the legislature to pass LD 1026 Dental Therapy Education Bill.

Sincerely,

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