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Testimony of the Maine Oral Health Coalition
Neither for Nor Against LD 1026,
Resolve, To Direct the University of Maine System to Establish a
Dental Therapy Degree Program

March 22, 2023

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The Maine Oral Health Coalition represents a statewide group of organizations and individuals who work together as a network to support each other in raising awareness and promoting oral health and dental disease prevention activities, through community education and advocacy, with the vision that oral health is valued as a vital element of wellness for all Maine residents.

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, this testimony is submitted on behalf of the Maine Oral Health Coalition. Founded 25 years ago as the Maine Dental Access Coalition, we have functioned as a broad network, and maintain a close interest in policy and systems changes that can improve access to services and oral health status in Maine.

The Coalition has been consistently supportive of legislative proposals that come forward with the intent to increase access to oral health services throughout Maine. LD 1026 demonstrates that intent by proposing that the State of Maine establish an accredited dental therapy degree program. We all should do all that we can to encourage interested and motivated individuals to pursue dental professional education, and dental therapists make an important and increasingly significant contribution to the "family" of dental care providers, especially in a large rural state that has experienced chronic challenges in access to oral health care. Dental therapists are not new. The educational model has been tested and evaluated, and dental therapists provide safe, consistent, and quality care.

LD 1026 represents a measurable potential benefit for the State. However, we are not in a position to evaluate the capacity of the University of Maine at Augusta to develop, establish, and sustain a dental therapy degree program. Requesting accreditation from the American Dental Association Commission on Dental Accreditation is not a simple process and requires significant preparation and planning. It's because of what we don't know that we take the NFNA position at this time.

We urge the Committee to consider the positive potential of LD 1026 for helping to relieve the severe and persistent workforce challenges that limit access to oral health care.

Thank you.

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