



Testimony of Kalie Hess, Associate Director
Children's Oral Health Network of Maine

In support of LD 1026: Resolve, To Direct the University of Maine System to Establish a Dental Therapy
Degree Program
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
Public Hearing: March 22, 2023

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Kalie Hess and I am the Associate Director of the Children's Oral Health Network of Maine (COHN/Network). Our network includes providers of dental care and leaders in communities and educational institutions, working collaboratively to ensure that all children in Maine can grow up free from preventable dental disease.

It is no secret to anyone in the dental field that we are facing a workforce crisis. We hear daily from partners all over the state about the dental workforce shortage and we are actively working on solutions that can help us better use the workforce that we have to prevent disease before it begins. COHN has also been partnering with the State of Maine on their public oral health workforce effort. There are significant workforce challenges that are resulting in severe illness for people all over the state and our network is extremely concerned about this issue.

One way to expand the dental workforce is through dental therapists, which have been shown to be a cost-effective way to provide services and expand access to care,^{1,2} specifically expand access to children,³ and have proven to be clinically competent for the services they are licensed to provide.^{4,5,6,7,8} Access to dental therapy training has been a barrier to training more people in Maine to become dental therapists, especially when the only options have required traveling out of state.

Too many Mainers are facing extreme illness and are unable to access a dentist for the care they need. Dental therapists are an important mid-level provider, commonly accepted in the medical setting, that can be used to address this need. While we do not see dental therapy as a magic wand to address the significant workforce challenges Maine is facing, it is one important part of a comprehensive workforce

¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4062028/#bib8>

² <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8428854/>

³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4062028/#bib8>

⁴ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0022034513484333>

⁵ [https://jada.ada.org/article/S0002-8177\(14\)62042-0/fulltext](https://jada.ada.org/article/S0002-8177(14)62042-0/fulltext)

⁶ [https://jada.ada.org/article/S0002-8177\(14\)62042-0/fulltext](https://jada.ada.org/article/S0002-8177(14)62042-0/fulltext)

⁷ <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/18978392/>

⁸ <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0022034513484333?journalCode=jdrb>



Children's Oral Health Network of Maine

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strategy. Notably, increasing the number of dental therapists has been identified as a priority through the state of Maine's public oral health workforce strategic planning efforts over the last winter.

In order to grow more dental therapists in the state, Maine needs an affordable and accessible training program. It makes a lot of sense to establish a dental therapy degree program at the University of Maine at Augusta, which has a reputation for bringing accessible and high-quality dental hygiene education to students. We recognize that the development of a program is a significant expense and support including necessary funding to enable UMA to address this critical workforce need in the state.

Thank you for your consideration of this testimony.