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Testimony in support of LD 1837: 'An Act to Increase Oral Health Services'

Senator Baldacci and Representative Meyer and esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Deborah Hagler. I reside in Harpswell. I have practiced General Pediatrics for 26 years in Brunswick. I am the immediate past President of the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

If you have ever had an urgent visit to the dentist for a toothache you inherently understand what decades of research has confirmed - oral health is linked inextricably to our overall well-being, health, and quality of life. Chronic inflammation and disease in the oral cavity is linked to inflammatory processes in the body.¹ The better you take care of your teeth the healthier the body. Sadly, for children, dental caries is the most common chronic illness of childhood. Many children lack access to routine dental care in Maine. This situation is especially dire as we do not have the dental workforce to meet needs.

LD 1837 seeks to build Maine's capacity to care for the oral health needs of our state- especially our youth by expanding the School Oral Health Program to all Public Schools and asking Mainecare to pilot payment strategies to support this work. In addition, this bill helps build our public health prevention infrastructure at the Maine CDC by making the temporary Oral Health Positions Permanent.

Poor oral hygiene is associated with a host of chronic illnesses including cardiovascular disease, Alzheimer's disease, and prostate cancer. Investing in the infrastructure that may help in these debilitating illnesses² and leading drivers of mortality is an investment in the people of Maine.

The Maine AAP strongly supports and asks for the passage of LD1837.

1.Kapila YL.Oral health's inextricable connection to systemic health: Special populations bring to bear multimodal relationships and factors connecting periodontal disease to systemic diseases and conditions. *Periodontol* 2000. 2021 Oct;87(1):11-16. doi: 10.1111/prd.12398. PMID: 34463994; PMCID: PMC8457130.

2.Kim YJ. Oral health of high-cost patients and evaluation of oral health measures as predictors for high-cost patients in South Korea: a population-based cohort study. *BMJ Open*. 2019 Sep 12;9(9):e032446. doi: 10.1136/bmjopen-2019-032446. PMID: 31515435; PMCID: PMC6747678.