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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.*

Testimony of the Maine Oral Health Coalition
Submitted by Judith Feinstein, Coordinator
In Support of LD 1837,
An Act To Increase Oral Health Services
May 12, 2023

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, this testimony is submitted on behalf of the Maine Oral Health Coalition (MOHC) in support of LD 1837. Founded 25 years ago as the Maine Dental Access Coalition, we continue to function 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.

LD 1837 proposes to take significant steps to bolster the Maine CDC's Oral Health Program within the Office of Rural Health and Primary Care in the Maine CDC. It makes permanent two key positions adding to efforts already underway to rebuild the capacity the program had, eight to ten years ago and more.

LD 1837 proposes a modest investment by adding key infrastructure to strengthen our state's oral health program and create a backbone for the capacity needed to develop and implement interventions that will improve the oral health of all Maine residents, across the lifespan. Oral health is integral to overall health, and a state level program should be adequately funded and staffed. An oral health educator and a data & research assistant will expand the program's capacity to coordinate with other health promotion efforts, evaluate and enhance the state's long-standing and effective school-based oral health program, enhance its ability to collect and analyze reliable data and to evaluate program effectiveness, and last but not least, to compete successfully to bring federal dollars to Maine. I know this, based on my 18 years of experience as the State Oral Health Program Manager; during that time, we obtained over \$4 million to help improve the oral health of all people in Maine.

National guidelines assert that state oral health programs with adequate infrastructure and capacity are integral to the mission of state health agencies. Other provisions of LD 1837 support increasing *sustainability*, by directing MaineCare to develop an alternative payment pilot for financing school-based oral health services; and *accountability* by authorizing this Committee to consider and if appropriate, report out legislation in the 2024 Legislative session based on the recommendations of the next oral health report from DHHS. Sustainability and accountability are guardrails for an effective program that can make a real difference in the lives of Maine people.

Thank you for your support for LD 1837 and your continued support of the Maine CDC's Oral Health Program.

/s/ *Judith Feinstein*

Judith Feinstein, MSPH, Coordinator