

Norma J. Desjardins, DMD
Van Buren, ME
njdesj@gmail.com

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

May 12, 2023

Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and Distinguished Members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

I am a general dentist and the director of St Apollonia Dental Clinic, a nonprofit dental home for over 3000 Aroostook County children. I write this testimony not as the clinic director, but rather from my personal observations and experience gained from 30+ years of practice and service in the County.

I am writing to express my support for LD 1837. This bill includes numerous initiatives to ensure access to children's oral health service, including but not limited to: defining the goal of ensuring that children in public schools across Maine receive preventive oral health services consistently; and making permanent the positions of oral health educator and data and research analyst at the Maine CDC.

There are many reasons why this is a good idea for the citizens of the State of Maine.

In the first half of my career, in private practice, I saw many patients and families who *could afford* to come into our dental office. Then I served on the Health Advisory Council for ACAP, and I soon became aware of the many, many (300+) Head Start students who began school each year reporting they did not have a dentist to go to. We established St. Apollonia Dental Clinic to provide a dental home for those children who did not have access to one. The Clinic has been in operation for over 9 years and provides a full-time, comprehensive, quality, caring dental home for thousands of children.

Unfortunately, there are still thousands of children we are not reaching. They are invisible to us. There are those who will never have a dental visit until they have an urgent issue and end up in the local E.R. It is imperative that there is a system in place to locate and provide resources and services for these children. Hence, many children will benefit from having programs in schools, receiving consistent preventive care and with a better possibility of being referred to and finding a dental home. LD 1837 addresses a real problem and provides real solutions. Thank you.

Submitted by: *Norma Desjardins DMD*