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Testimony of the Maine Dental Association
Before the Health and Human Services Committee

Testimony in Support

LD 1837 An Act to Increase Oral Health Services

Public Hearing: Friday, May 12, 2023

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

My name is Therese Cahill and I serve as the Executive Director of the Maine Dental Association. The MDA is a statewide association dedicated to advancing excellence in dentistry.

I apologize for being unable to personally present the MDA's testimony today but family obligations prevent me from doing so.

The MDA represents 85% of the dentists in Maine; there are approximately 775 practicing and retired dentists who are active members of the association. And on a genuinely positive note, the states where the dentists per 100,000 population increased the most between 2010 and 2020 were North Carolina (14.4 percent), Texas (13.9 percent) and **Maine (12.5 percent)**.¹

On behalf of the Maine Dental Association, I am respectfully providing testimony in support of ***LD 1837, An Act to Increase Oral Health Services.***

The MDA supported ***LD 1501 An Act to Protect Oral Health for Children in Maine*** sponsored by Representative Gramlich in the 130th Legislature with a similar goal of expanding dental services to school children throughout Maine. LD 1501 received a unanimous ought to pass as amended vote. The Committee went even further, voting to add LD 1501 to the short list of bills requiring funding sent to the Appropriations Committee during budget negotiations. And while some of the language was incorporated, the program was never adequately funded.

¹ [ADA.org: HPI Infographics | The Dentist Workforce – Key Facts](https://www.ada.org/en/about-ada/press-room/infographics)

In order to ensure that ALL children, regardless of family economic status, receive at least one preventive dental visit annually it's absolutely essential that LD 1837 is passed and that the necessary funding is appropriated.

We are all aware that Maine, despite passage of an adult MaineCare dental benefit and a significant increase in MaineCare dental fees, continues to struggle with sufficient access to dental care. The MDA continues to work with the Department on issues that have stymied access.

It's also critical to note that dental practices across the state have struggled to find sufficient staff. On average, for at least the last two years, it's taken approximately six months to fill a dental hygienist position. And we have practices across Maine where dentists are the providers of hygiene services to their patients. Dental assisting positions pose a challenge as well.

Following is an excerpt from a 2022 publication co-authored by the ADA's Health Policy Institute, the American Dental Hygienists Association, and the American Dental Assistants Association:

IMPACT OF WORKFORCE SHORTAGES ON DENTAL PRACTICE Staffing issues were cited as the most significant concern among dentists in January 2022 and remained the top concern in July 2022. This is consistent with other industries predominantly structured as small businesses, where – despite recent record-breaking inflation – workforce shortages remain the most significant problem. The shortages have caused an estimated 11% reduction in dental practice capacity. In July 2022, 4 in 10 dental practices indicated they were recruiting or had recently recruited dental assistants (DA), and nearly the same share indicated they were recruiting dental hygienists (DH). Among dentists recruiting for these positions, the vast majority – 9 in 10 – indicated it was “extremely” or “very” challenging. Additionally in July 2022, about 1 in 3 dentists who did not have full schedules indicated that vacant staff positions were at least part of the problem. Recruitment activity in dental offices and its associated level of difficulty have gradually increased over the two years that HPI has polled dentists on these topics.²

The shortage of dental professionals is not endemic to Maine and certainly all the more reason for us to work together to solve these problems.

Thank you for your time and attention.

² [Dental workforce shortages: Data to Navigate Today's Labor Market \(ada.org\)](https://ada.org/2022/07/20/dental-workforce-shortages-data-to-navigate-todays-labor-market)