



**Testimony of Becca Matusovich, Executive Director
Children's Oral Health Network of Maine
on LD 2214**

An Act to Make Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds and to Change Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025
Before the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services
Public Hearing: February 26, 2024

Good afternoon Senators Rotundo and Baldacci, Representatives Sachs and Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services. My name is Becca Matusovich and I am the Executive Director of the Children's Oral Health Network of Maine. Our Network is a collaborative effort, funded primarily by philanthropic dollars, which aims to make Maine a place where all children can grow up free from preventable dental disease.

I am here today to ask you to amend LD 2214 to incorporate LD 1837 into the Supplemental budget. This bill was a priority that was unanimously supported by HHS last session, and both of these committees have supported multiple measures in recent years to expand oral health access for our state. LD 1837 is quite small in what it is asking for, but it is very important to our state's ability to meet the oral health needs of our people, and I will explain why.

Last year, you funded the restoration of the Maine CDC's Oral Health Program Manager position, which was a critical step to rebuilding our public health agency's ability to provide leadership on oral health. However, the needs are huge – we are talking about the most common chronic disease of childhood, and the overwhelming majority of our state has long been classified as a dental professional shortage area. The disparities in access to preventive care were terrible before Covid, and the pandemic exacerbated all of the pre-existing challenges.

Last session, the legislature did the right thing in funding the expansion of the School Oral Health Program rate reform and adding the comprehensive adult dental benefit for MaineCare, as well as the. However, this means that the number of people with comprehensive dental coverage through MaineCare has increased from about 89,000 children in 2019 to over 408,000 children and adults in 2023. At the same time, the number of providers accepting MaineCare has dropped, while the needs they are trying to meet have gotten increasingly complex.

There are not enough dental offices for all people in Maine to have a traditional dental home, however many partners are working together to test new models of care that have the potential for serving many more people in the state. For these efforts to succeed, we need our state public health agency

to provide the kind of leadership that a public health challenge of this size, scope, and complexity deserves. The new oral health program manager is fantastic but one person alone cannot carry the entire weight of the state's role in this public-private partnership. The Oral Health Educator and Data Specialist positions were created as time-limited positions with ARPA funding, but it is difficult to fill positions that are time-limited because nobody wants to take a job in state government that is going to end soon.

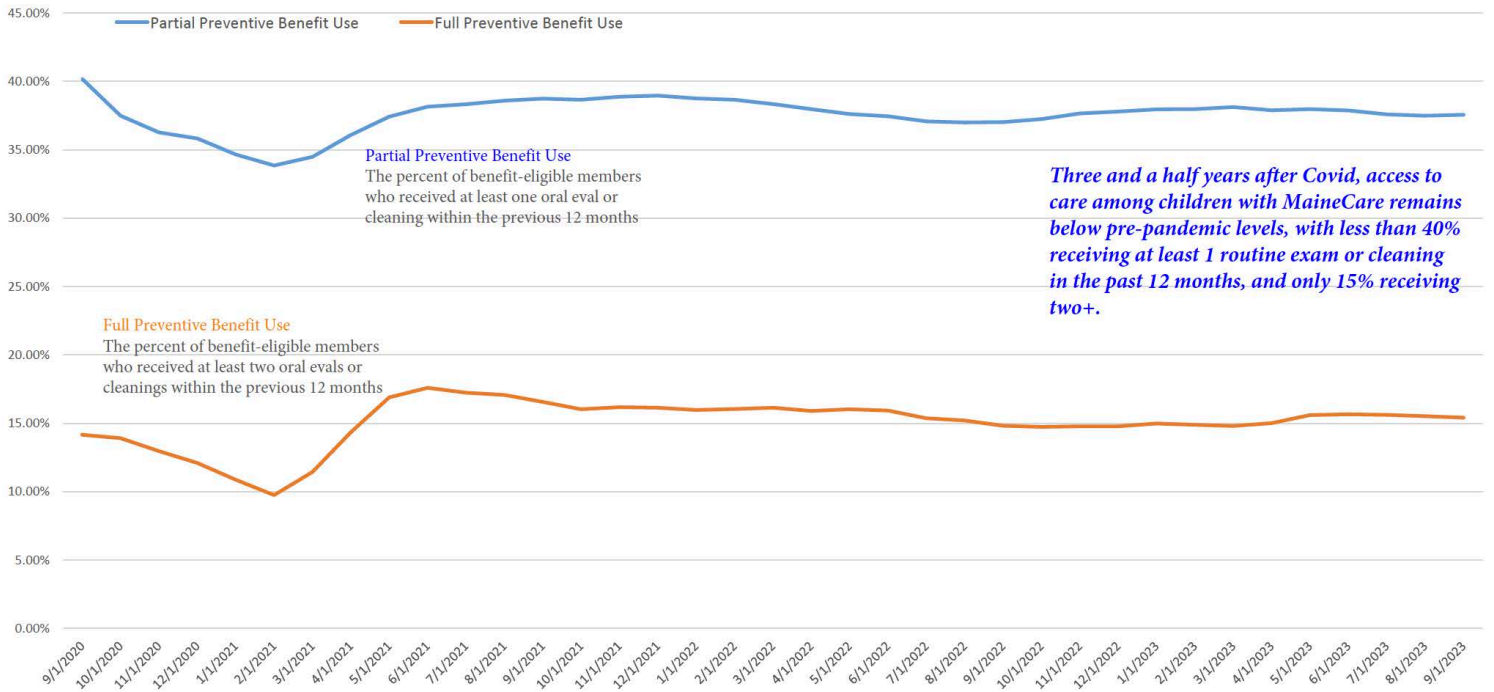
All we are asking is to make these two time-limited positions permanent, which would cost only about \$200,000 per year. This is a very modest investment with huge "bang for the buck." It represents pennies in the context of the state budget, but it is incredibly important to the success of our public-private partnership.

I don't want to imply that filling these two positions will single-handedly solve the crisis of dental disease and lack of access to care that plagues our state. However, it is an absolutely essential part of the solution; it will increase the efficiency and effectiveness of all of the other efforts that we and many other partners are working hard on to improve oral health in Maine.

You took a huge step forward over the last several sessions in investing in the major elements of our state's public health approach to oral health. However, as the graphs I attached to my testimony from MaineCare's dental data dashboard show, the job is not yet done. Now is not the time to squander that investment by leaving our public health agency without the capacity it needs to help us collectively rise to the challenge of getting Maine people the oral health care they need and deserve.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have. Thank you for your support on this important issue.

Member Use of Services, Full/Partial Preventive Benefit Use, Children Under 21

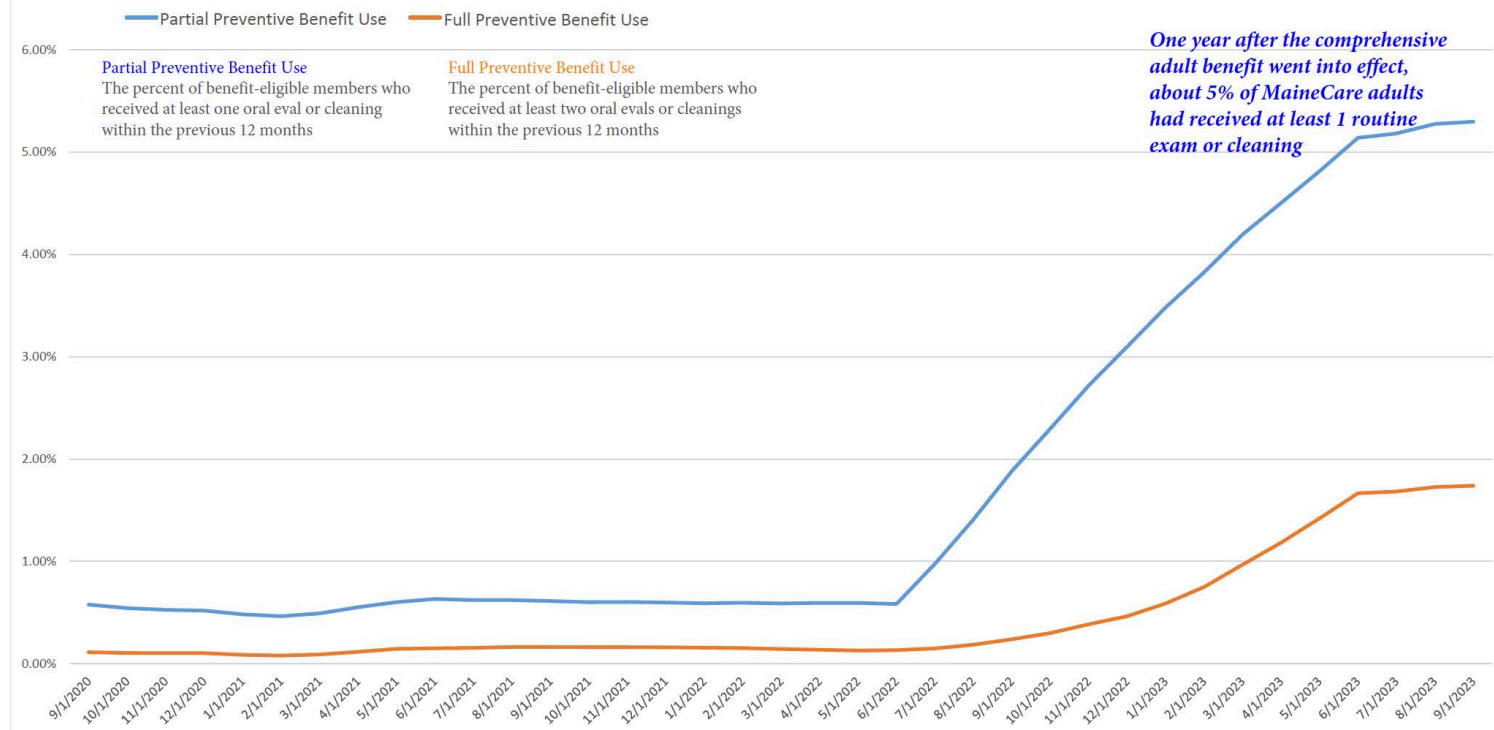


https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/sites/maine.gov.dhhs/files/inline-files/MaineCare_Dental_Measures_202309_1.pdf

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Member Use of Services, Full/Partial Preventive Benefit Use, Adults 21+



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