



**Testimony of Kalie Hess, Associate 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 Kalie Hess and I am the Associate Director of the Children's Oral Health Network of Maine, a network dedicated to ensuring that all children can grow up free from preventable dental disease.

As you will also hear from our executive director, we are here to ensure that a bill that passed with unanimous support from the Health and Human Services Committee, and which garnered their support for being included as one of their funding priorities, is funded in the supplemental budget. That bill is [LD 1837: An Act to Increase Oral Health Services](#).

This hearing came up quickly, and over February vacation week which makes it hard to coordinate partners who have been steadfast in their support of the need for these positions. Given that, I wanted to take some time to highlight the organizations that have been in support of this bill to address the issues plaguing Maine's dental system, including access challenges, workforce shortages, and more, to ensure that what seems like a small amount of money doesn't get lost in the vastness of the budget discussions.

[Wendy Alpaugh](#), a longtime dentist in Stonington, testified to the former strength of our oral health program at the Maine CDC, applauding the educational resources that were available to her when there was an adequately-staffed program to support her public health outreach in her community.

The [Maine Association of School Nurses](#) highlighted their need for support from the Maine CDC to keep our students healthy and in the classroom, which includes having oral health educational resources available and connections to oral health prevention and treatment resources as needed.

The [Maine Dental Association](#) submitted testimony highlighting the importance of state capacity and leadership to address workforce challenges and access issues that are worsening.

[Consumers for Affordable Health Care](#) testified to the significant challenges people with MaineCare face when looking for oral health care, and the importance of having capacity at the Maine CDC to address this issue.

The [Maine Primary Care Association](#) testified to the importance of this bill for ensuring that legislative oral health priorities can be successfully executed, including the recently expanded School Oral Health Program and the comprehensive adult dental benefit in MaineCare.

The [Maine Oral Health Coalition](#) testified to the fact that the state used to have more of the capacity that LD 1837 aims to rebuild, stating that “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 reiterate: this bill is small in the scheme of the state budget but incredibly critical in ensuring that we have the capacity in Maine to ensure that our dental system doesn’t continue to fracture at an increasingly concerning rate.

More organizations and individuals testified in support of the need for state infrastructure to support our faltering oral health system. I encourage you to check out their testimony, and ask for your support on behalf of all our partners to fund this bill.

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