

Kala Myers-French
Camden
LD 1361

Testimony in Support of LD 1361 – “An Act to Require Insurance Coverage for Covered Dental Services Provided by Licensed Dental Hygienists and to Authorize Licensed Dental Hygienists to Bill Commercial Insurance”

Dear Senator Bailey, Representative Perry, and distinguished members of the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Committee,

My name is Kala Myers-French, and I am a licensed Independent Practice Dental Hygienist (IPDH) in Camden, Maine. I also serve as the founder of Balanced Dental Hygiene Suite, an integrative dental hygiene practice, and as Executive Director of Maine Oral Health & Wellness, a nonprofit mobile dental program serving underserved children and working families across the state.

I’m writing today in strong support of LD 1361, which is vital not just for dental hygienists, but for the overall health and accessibility of care for Maine residents.

As a provider working in both the private and nonprofit sectors, I face unnecessary barriers every day because I am not allowed to bill all commercial insurance directly. My practice sees patients who cannot otherwise afford care including but not limited our most vulnerable populations the children and elderly—but when I cannot be reimbursed for covered services simply because I’m not billing under a dentist, it restricts my ability to sustainably serve my community. This policy punishes providers who are working on the frontlines of access and prevention.

LD 1361 is not about expanding scope of practice. It is about recognizing the credentials and contributions of licensed dental hygienists who are already legally permitted to provide these services. We are trained, licensed professionals providing preventive and therapeutic care that keeps patients out of the emergency room and reduces overall healthcare costs. We should be reimbursed at the same level as a dentist for providing the services within our scope of practice and I urge you to also advocate for equity in the fee schedules utilized for hygienists as the care provided does not change whether we are in the office run by a dentist or practicing on our own. I could actually argue that we are able to provide a more profound preventive and therapeutic treatment as an IPDH because that is our specialty and focus.

This bill is especially important for hygienists like myself who serve medically underserved areas and operate independently or through nonprofit outreach. Right now, the inability to bill all commercial insurance directly, especially medicare advantage plans, which forces us to turn away patients with insurance, spend hours dealing with billing, or worse, find complicated workarounds that undermine and reduce both patient care and provider sustainability. In my nonprofit mobile program, we could serve hundreds more patients—many of them children—if we were able to bill all commercial insurers directly and equitably.

LD 1361 simply levels the playing field. It ensures that when a dental hygienist provides a covered service that we are licensed to provide, the reimbursement is fair and not dependent on whether a dentist is associated with the claim. That’s integrity. That’s equity. And that’s how we build a sustainable healthcare model in Maine focused on prevention of disease not just restoration of it.

I urge you to vote “Ought to Pass” on LD 1361. Your support will directly improve access to dental care across our state and recognize the value of the hygienists doing this critical work.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Kala Myers-French, IPDH
Balanced Dental Hygiene Suite & Maine Oral Health & Wellness
Camden, Maine