



**Testimony of Kalie Hess, Associate Director  
Children's Oral Health Network of Maine**

*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 Dental Insurance*

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services

Public Hearing: April 24, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services. My name is Kalie Hess, and I am here today on behalf of the Children's Oral Health Network of Maine (COHN) to ask for your support on LD 1361.

COHN is a network of trusted organizations and individuals united by a shared vision: a Maine where all children can grow up free from preventable dental disease. Despite limited resources, our partners work creatively and persistently to bring quality oral health care to children across the state amid a growing oral health crisis. Our legislative efforts largely fall in the Health and Human Services Committee and we have worked in partnership with them over several legislative sessions to advance bipartisan solutions to address Maine's oral health crisis. I am grateful for the opportunity today to speak with your committee on the importance of this bill as part of the solution to this crisis.

Maine is facing an acute workforce shortage in the oral health field. One key strategy to address this challenge is enabling dental hygienists to work at the top of their license. By fully utilizing their skills and training, we can expand access to high-quality care across the state. That's why we strongly support efforts to ensure hygienists are equitably recognized, supported, and empowered in their roles. Hygienists are essential partners in addressing our state's pediatric oral health crisis. We rely on them to lead innovative, community-based initiatives that reach children where they are—in schools, early childhood programs, and other community settings—often outside the traditional dental office model of care delivery.

This bill helps address an outdated and overly narrow approach to delivering dental care. With only 20% of children with MaineCare and 56% with commercial dental insurance having a dental home, we must expand care beyond the walls of traditional dental offices to reach more children (and adults).<sup>1</sup> This requires supporting provider models that value the training, expertise, and scope of hygienists.

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<sup>1</sup> Fox, K. S., Kumarage, A., McGuire, C., & Stultz, E. (2024). Assessing Maine children's access to a dental home: Dental insurance does not guarantee receipt of dental care. University of Southern Maine, Muskie School of Public Service, Catherine E. Cutler Institute, Population Health & Health Policy. <https://www.maineconh.org/assets/stock/2024-Dental-Home-Utilization-Maine-Children.pdf>

Ensuring parity for hygienist-led care is not only a matter of fairness—it is a strategic and necessary move to improve access and outcomes for Maine’s children.

We ask you to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1361 to help close another critical gap in our system and make the most of our limited oral health work force by supporting more innovative models of care.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome any questions.