



4-28-25

Dear Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson and Members of the Joint Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Committee,

My name is Lorraine Klug and I am the Immediate Past President and Legislative Chair of the Maine Dental Hygienists' Assoc. I'm testifying as a concerned health professional to urge you to vote Ought Not to Pass on LD 1615: To An Act to Expand Access to Oral Health Care by Creating a New Path for Obtaining a License to Practice Dentistry.

This legislation is a direct threat to patient safety, professional integrity, and public trust. Dentistry is a highly technical and complex medical discipline that demands precise training, critical clinical judgment, and a thorough understanding of American healthcare regulations and standards. There are no shortcuts when it comes to safeguarding human health and there must be no shortcuts to licensure.

While I deeply respect the talents and ambitions of dental professionals trained abroad, the quality and scope of dental education varies significantly from country to country. Without rigorous standardized assessment from a CODA approved program, there is no reliable way to guarantee that all practitioners meet the critical standards necessary to protect patient safety and public health. There is already a pathway for dentists trained outside the country to gain licensure in Maine. It consists of comparing their program to CODA accreditation standards. If their education is equivalent and they have passed the necessary board exams then they can qualify for licensure. This proves competency and safety through equivalent educational standards. This bill would also allow for these individuals to practice not only dentistry but dental hygiene. They may have no training or education whatsoever if dental hygiene procedures and no dental hygiene boards are required to show competency.

This licensee would also be working under the general supervision of a licensed dentist which means the supervisor doesn't even have to be in the office observing the treatment they are providing. This is not in the best interest of our patients. The other piece to this legislation is the requirement to work in a board approved setting. This usually implies services for the lower socioeconomic patient which shouldn't mean that you are entitled to substandard care.

Granting licensure without requiring these potential licensees to meet the same benchmarks expected of U.S. graduates would compromise patient safety. Ensuring that every dentist possesses a uniform level of clinical competency and familiarity with U.S. healthcare protocols is essential to safeguarding patients. Without guaranteed standardized training, patients could be subjected to substandard care, misdiagnoses, and irreversible harm.

From a dental hygiene standpoint, many foreign-trained dentists are unfamiliar with essential instruments such as the Gracey curette which is a critical tool designed to remove subgingival calculus buildup that is taught in all dental hygiene and dental schools in the U.S. If not properly addressed, this buildup can cause severe inflammation and periodontal disease, ultimately contributing to serious systemic conditions like diabetes, heart disease, and more. We shouldn't allow individuals who lack training in such fundamental clinical practices to practice dental hygiene.

This also undermines public trust. Patients rely on state licensure as an assurance of consistent, high-quality care and training. Lowering standards risks eroding confidence in our healthcare system.

This sets a precedent for weakening professional standards. Dentistry is just one of many highly specialized fields. Eroding licensure requirements here could open the door to lowering standards in other critical healthcare professions.

On behalf of countless patients and practitioners who value professionalism, safety, and highly educated and trained practitioners, I respectfully ask you to vote NO on any proposal to weaken licensure standards for foreign-trained dentists.

As a licensed dental hygienist, I fully support increasing access to care which I believe is the intent of this bill but it's flawed in that it creates a two-tiered system of care in Maine. One in which a provider must go to an accredited school and pass board exams that prove competence, the other in which we are taking persons who have been trained outside of the US, where accreditation may not exist, and the same standards may not be adhered to. The second tier appears to be for those of a lower socioeconomic status. Someone who has no insurance or is underinsured deserves to be seen by someone who has proven that they are trained, competent, and safe to treat patients just as anyone else.

I urge you to please vote ONTP on LD 1615 and protect Maine citizens. Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. We are grateful for your leadership in maintaining the integrity of dental care in our state.

Sincerely, Lorraine Klug, dental hygienist, Ellsworth, representing MDHA as Immediate Past President and Legislative chair.