

In **Strong** Opposition to LD 1615, An Act to Expand Access to Oral Health Care by Creating a New Path for Obtaining a License to Practice Dentistry.

To the Honorable Members of Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services,

My name is Hena Patel, and I am a general dentist working in Lewiston, ME.

I am submitting this testimony in strong opposition to the proposed and potentially dangerous legislation which is to establish an adjunct dental license in Maine. While I appreciate the need for innovative approaches to address the dental workforce shortage in Maine, I have significant concerns about the potential implications of this bill for patient safety, professional standards, and the integrity of our dental licensure system.

1. Erosion of Maine's High Educational Standards

Maine's dental licensure process is designed to ensure that all dentists meet rigorous, evidence-based standards of education, training, and clinical competency. The doctoral-level education required for licensure is the foundation for ensuring that our patients receive the highest standard of care. Someone who decides to pursue a career in dentistry in the U.S. is investing mentally, physically, and financially. It is not an "easy" path by any means requiring a minimum 8 years of schooling. Allowing someone who has not achieved this level of accredited education, even with "supervision", to practice without meeting these standards undermines the trust that the public places in licensed dental professionals. This diminishes the overall quality of care provided in our communities.

2. Risks to Patient Safety

Dental care involves complex and invasive procedures that are irreversible, from performing surgeries, to administering local anesthesia in highly vascular areas, and even diagnosing conditions that can have serious long term health impacts. Dentists are responsible for the patient. Allowing a dentist trained outside of the United States, or without a U.S. equivalent doctorate degree, to practice under only "general supervision" raises significant concerns about patient safety. This arrangement does not address the critical need for oversight and competency checks. This bill places Maine's people at risk and encourages disproportionate levels of care, creating a significant ethical concern.

3. Ambiguity in Pathway to Full Licensure

This bill proposes that adjunct dentists who practice for three years in "good standing" will be eligible to apply for full licensure. However, the bill does not provide sufficient details on

how “good standing” will be assessed or what measures will be in place to evaluate the clinical competency of these professionals. Without established criteria or standardized assessments, there is a risk in granting full licensure based on time alone. This would allow dentists without adequate training to practice in our state, again compromising care for patients.

4. Public Trust and Professional Integrity

Maine’s dental professionals are held to the highest standards to protect the health and well-being of the people. The introduction of a lower standard of licensure would crumble public trust and diminish the reputation of our state’s dental care. It is critical that Maine maintains its commitment to patient safety and high-quality care by ensuring that all practicing dentists meet the full educational and clinical requirements that have been established to protect the public.

In conclusion, I urge you to consider the ethical concerns of this bill. Stand with the people of Maine, my patients, and reject LD1615.

Thank you for your time and commitment to protecting the oral health of Maine.

Sincerely,

Hena Patel, DMD