

Testimony in 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

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Cara R. Dionne, and I am a registered dental hygienist with nearly 20 years of experience, the majority of which I have spent working in pediatric dentistry with the MaineCare population. I have dedicated my career to serving children and families who often face the greatest barriers to oral health care.

I am writing to express my strong opposition to LD 1615.

While I support the goal of increasing access to dental care in underserved areas, this bill does so by creating a two-tiered system that is neither equitable nor ethical. It proposes a path for individuals to obtain a license to practice dentistry through reduced training standards, essentially creating a separate—and lower—standard of care for vulnerable populations. Maine already has a pathway for licensure for foreign trained dentists who can show their degree is equivalent. As someone who has spent two decades working with these communities, I find this deeply troubling.

LD 1615 would send the harmful message that Maine is willing to accept a lesser standard of care for those who rely on public insurance or live in rural or low-income areas. This is not only unjust—it is dangerous. Dental procedures, especially those involving surgery, diagnosis, and irreversible treatment, require comprehensive education and training to ensure safety and effectiveness. Anything less places patients at risk.

Moreover, this bill opens the door for the future erosion of standards across all areas of dentistry. Once we normalize lower qualifications for care in one setting, what stops us from extending those standards elsewhere? This is a slippery slope with long-term consequences for the profession and, more importantly, for patient outcomes.

Instead of endorsing a lower tier of dental care, we should be investing in strategies that maintain high standards while expanding access. These include loan forgiveness programs for dental professionals, increased Medicaid reimbursement rates, and incentives to practice in rural or underserved communities, all of which are currently being worked on in this legislative session.

As a licensed dental hygienist who has worked closely with the MaineCare population for almost two decades, I can tell you with confidence: our patients deserve the same level of care as anyone else. LD 1615 falls short of that promise.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge you to vote **ought not to pass** on LD 1615.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to oral health equity.

Sincerely,

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