



Senator Rafferty, Representative Noonan Murphy , and Members of the Education & Cultural Affairs Committee:

My name is Traci Dempsey, I live in Bath, Maine. I president of the Maine Dental Hygienists' Association that represents the nearly 1300 licensed dental hygienists in Maine. I have seen firsthand how our dental workforce shortage is impacting access to care—particularly in underserved rural, urban, and low-income communities across our state and urge you to vote OTP on LD 1891.

This bill addresses a critical issue: too many residents cannot access basic oral health services because there simply aren't enough dental professionals in their communities.

The proposed legislation takes a comprehensive and sustainable approach to strengthening the dental workforce by establishing targeted scholarships and extending loan repayment programs for dental professionals who commit to serving in high-need areas—an approach proven to attract and retain providers where they are needed most.

These are strategic investments with long-term returns—not only in improved oral health outcomes, but also in overall health, economic productivity, and equity. Poor oral health is linked to heart disease, diabetes, and other chronic conditions. Preventive dental care can help reduce costly emergency room visits and missed school or work days.

By reducing the financial burden on dental and dental hygiene students—many of whom graduate with a significant amount of debt—this bill makes it possible for talented individuals from diverse backgrounds to choose careers in community-based care, rather than being forced into high-income settings simply to repay their loans.

I also want to highlight how this bill supports a pipeline of future providers who reflect the communities they serve. Expanding access to scholarships and financial incentives makes the profession more inclusive, responsive, and sustainable.

Thank you for your time and attention. I'm happy to answer any questions.

Thank you,

Traci L. Dempsey, RDH, IPDH
President, Maine Dental Hygienists' Association
Resident of Bath, ME