

Testimony in Support of LD 1891: An Act to Expand Dental Access in Maine Through Scholarship, Loan Repayment, and Tax Credit Programs

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Health and Human Services Committee:

My name is Dr. Kailee Jorgenson, DMD, and I serve as the Clinical Director of Mainely Teeth and President of the Maine Oral Health Centers Alliance. I am writing today in strong support of LD 1891, a critical bill that will strengthen Maine's oral health system by directly addressing one of its greatest challenges: the severe and growing shortage of dental professionals in underserved areas.

Maine's oral health access crisis is not theoretical—it is a daily reality. Many communities, particularly in rural and low-income regions, face long wait times or have no access to dental care at all. Dental disease continues to burden children, adults, and seniors alike, often leading to preventable pain, missed work or school, and emergency room visits.

The Legislature has been asking for actionable, evidence-based solutions to the dental workforce shortage—and LD 1891 is a clear and practical example of the kinds of solutions we need. This bill provides a path forward to strengthen and grow the network of dental providers across Maine, particularly in the extreme shortage areas where care is hardest to find.

The reality is that many providers, especially new dental school graduates, are faced with staggering student loan debt, often exceeding \$300,000, at the same time that the costs of purchasing, starting, or operating a dental practice continue to rise. These economic pressures make it increasingly difficult to recruit and retain providers in Maine, particularly in rural areas where patient volume may be lower and overhead costs remain high. Without meaningful financial support and incentive, it is simply not a sustainable or attractive option for many of the dentists and allied professionals we desperately need.

By establishing both the Dentists for Maine's Future Scholarship Program and the Extreme Shortage Area Dental Education Loan Program, LD 1891 directly addresses these barriers. These programs will help recruit new providers and *retain* them by reducing debt burdens and offering loan repayment in exchange for service in high-need areas.

Additionally, expanding the dental care access tax credit to include dental hygienists, and extending its availability through 2032, is a practical and overdue recognition of the essential role these providers play in delivering preventive and therapeutic care.

As a practicing dentist and someone deeply involved in mobile and community-based care delivery, I can tell you firsthand: workforce development is foundational to oral health equity in Maine. Without bold investments like LD 1891, we will continue to fall short of reaching the people who need care the most.

I strongly urge the Committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1891. This bill is not only an investment in dental education—it is an investment in Maine's health, economy, and future.

Thank you for your consideration and for your ongoing commitment to addressing oral health disparities in our state.

Sincerely,

Dr. Kailee Jorgenson, DMD

Clinical Director, Mainely Teeth

President, Maine Oral Health Centers Alliance