

State of Maine | 132nd Legislature
Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
Testimony of Dr. Christopher Pezzullo on behalf of Maine Primary Care Association
May 6, 2025

Supporting:
**LD 1746, "An Act to Reduce Dental Disease and Ensure Access to Essential
Preventive Dental Care Among Maine Children"**
Sponsored by Representative Gramlich

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, I am Dr. Christopher Pezzullo, Chief Clinical Officer at Maine Primary Care Association (MPCA), and a pediatrician from Portland.

MPCA is a membership organization that represents Maine's Community Health Centers (CHCs), also known as Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs). Maine's CHCs make up the largest independent primary care network in the state, providing high quality and accessible primary and preventive medical, behavioral, and dental health services for over 200,000 people (1 in 6 Mainers) at more than 100 service delivery sites in all 16 Maine counties.

I strongly support LD 1746 and thank Representative Gramlich and other co-sponsors for bringing this legislation forward. This bill takes important steps to stop dental disease early and expand access to preventive care, strengthening Maine's overall public oral health infrastructure, particularly for Maine children.

In Maine, dental disease is the most common chronic disease in children, affecting their overall health, well-being, and school performance. During the 2023-24 school year, the School Oral Health Program visited over 200 schools and administered oral health screenings to more than 13,000 students. Of those screened, 30% had untreated decay, nearly 27% needed early intervention, and 6.5% needed immediate intervention. As a pediatrician, I support efforts to equip primary care providers with the ability to apply Silver Diamine Fluoride (SDF), a proven, effective treatment for arresting tooth decay.

This is practical step for the state to take to ensure that children receive the quality and accessible care they deserve. There is currently a shortage of oral health providers in Maine. Many CHCs, often one of the few providers in their service areas willing to accept MaineCare, have shared that they have waitlists of 100s. Primary care providers are poised to fill the void in oral health care by offering brief oral health screenings, fluoride varnish and SDF application. SDF is easily applied and can both halt and reverse dental cavities. It can also prevent the need for expensive and traumatic drilling and filling procedures.

I also support efforts to streamline the reimbursement of the application and ensure that it is offered by all insurers in Maine. SDF treatment can be rapidly taught to Maine's PCPs and provide a simple, low-cost treatment to a vexing public healthcare problem—how to provide care for dental disease in a state without access to oral health providers.

On behalf of Maine's Community Health Centers, thank you for considering my comments. Please do not hesitate to contact me directly at cpezzullo@mepca.org with any follow-up questions.

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