



Testimony of Dr. Michael Dowling, DMD

In Support of LD 1652 – “An Act to Support Health Care Providers Serving MaineCare Members”

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation

May 8, 2025

Senator Grohoski, Representative Perry, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation:

My name is Dr. Michael Dowling, and I am a board-certified pediatric dentist practicing in Yarmouth, Maine. For nearly 15 years, I’ve provided care to children and adolescents at 207 Pediatric Dentistry, which serves as a dental home to approximately 10,000 patients. About half of those we serve are covered by MaineCare. I also chair the Maine Dental Association’s Council on Government Relations and am a past president of the Maine Society of Pediatric Dentistry.

I write in strong support of LD 1652, “An Act to Support Health Care Providers Serving MaineCare Members.” Although this bill is under the jurisdiction of the Taxation Committee, its heart lies in health policy. It is about increasing access to care for low-income Mainers—especially children—and helping ensure there is a strong, stable network of providers willing and able to participate in the MaineCare program.

One important component of this bill is the proposed tax credit for health care professionals who treat MaineCare patients. This is a strategic incentive that acknowledges the realities providers face when participating in a program that has historically paid well below the cost of care. Modest financial offsets through the tax code can make a meaningful difference in retaining existing providers and attracting new ones, particularly in high-need areas. As providers evaluate where to practice and whether to participate in MaineCare, incentives like this matter.

Beyond financial relief, LD 1652 also wisely calls for dedicated staff within MaineCare to assist providers and patients. This is a critical and often overlooked piece of the puzzle. Many practices, especially smaller ones, struggle with the administrative complexity of the program—from eligibility issues and prior authorizations to coding requirements and denials. Having accessible, knowledgeable support staff within MaineCare who can help troubleshoot problems and guide patients through the system would reduce frustration, save time, and ultimately help more people receive the care they need.

Another essential component of this bill is its recognition that reimbursement rates must be increased. While I am proud to continue serving MaineCare families, I can say from firsthand experience that the current rates simply do not reflect the costs of providing care. For many providers, especially those just starting out or managing significant overhead, it is not financially viable to participate fully in the program.

Dr. Mike Brown Dowling

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We also know from research that raising Medicaid reimbursement improves access to care. For example:

- A 2019 report from the Urban Institute found that increases in Medicaid physician fees were associated with higher rates of provider participation and improved appointment availability for Medicaid patients.
- A 2017 study in Health Affairs showed that when Medicaid reimbursement rates for dental services rose to approach commercial insurance rates, children's access to dental care increased significantly.
- The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) has also documented the link between higher Medicaid payment rates and better access to services, especially in primary and specialty care.

LD 1652 takes a holistic approach by combining financial incentives, system-level support, and payment reform. These changes are urgently needed if we are serious about maintaining a robust network of MaineCare providers—and ensuring that Maine's children and families do not face long delays, unnecessary travel, or complete lack of access.

I respectfully urge you to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1652. Thank you for your time, your consideration, and your work to make health care more accessible for all Mainers.

Sincerely,
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