



**Testimony of Kalie Hess, Associate Director  
Children's Oral Health Network of Maine**

**[LD 1652: An Act to Create a Tax Credit for Providers of Dental Care for MaineCare Recipients](#)**

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation

Public Hearing: May 8, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Grohoski, Representative Cloutier, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation. My name is Kalie Hess, and I am here today on behalf of the Children's Oral Health Network of Maine (COHN) to ask for your support on LD 1652.

COHN is a network of trusted organizations and individuals united by a shared vision: a Maine where all children grow up free from preventable dental disease. Despite limited resources, our partners work creatively and persistently to bring quality oral health care to children across the state, even as we face a growing oral health crisis. While much of our legislative work falls under the Health and Human Services Committee, we are grateful for the opportunity to speak with you today about why LD 1652 is a critical part of addressing this crisis. We were part of the MaineCare Task Force discussions that resulted in this bill, and we appreciated the collaborative effort to address the challenges together with all of the other partners who came together in the task force.

Maine is facing an acute shortage of oral health providers, particularly for children and families enrolled in MaineCare. Currently, only about one in five children with MaineCare have an active dental home, meaning a dental office where they have been able to get at least one cleaning and one exam a year.<sup>1</sup> Many of us would consider that the bare minimum of oral health care, but even that is out of reach for most MaineCare-enrolled children.

One major barrier to recruiting dental providers to enroll with MaineCare is the significant administrative burden they face when working with MaineCare: outdated billing systems, communication challenges, delays and hoops to jump through for reimbursement, and a lack of a clear point of contact for dental-related issues. These challenges are so substantial that stakeholders worked with the Office of MaineCare Services to create a Dental Subcommittee of the MaineCare Advisory Committee. This subcommittee was meant to help raise concerns, suggest improvements, and provide a space for collaboration, but even with this collaborative structure in place, the responsibility for different elements of the problems and solutions are so fragmented across different roles within MaineCare, none of whom have any specific expertise with how dental care or dental billing works.

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<sup>1</sup> Fox, K. S., Kumarage, A., McGuire, C., & Stultz, E. (2024). Assessing Maine children's access to a dental home: Dental insurance does not guarantee receipt of dental care. University of Southern Maine, Muskie School of Public Service, Catherine E. Cutler Institute, Population Health & Health Policy. <https://www.maineconh.org/assets/stock/2024-Dental-Home-Utilization-Maine-Children.pdf>

This means that there can rarely be a single point of contact identified with dedicated responsibility, and the knowledge and understanding necessary, for implementing solutions. The result is that many urgent issues remain unresolved for months and even years on end.

Meanwhile, providers — many graduating with something like half a million dollars in student loan debt — must weigh the high costs of practicing in Maine against both the reimbursement rates MaineCare offers and the administrative burden required to recoup that reimbursement. From conversations with our Network partners, with the recent MaineCare reimbursement rate improvements, the administrative burden may now be an even bigger reason why so many are unable or unwilling to accept MaineCare, leaving most children who have MaineCare without access to care for the most common chronic disease of childhood.

Without systemic improvements, including more dedicated staff at MaineCare to manage and support the dental benefit, more support for care coordination, and a tax incentive for providers who choose to serve MaineCare patients, we will continue to see the door to oral health care remain locked for far too many Maine kids and adults in every community across Maine.

We respectfully ask you to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1652 to help ensure we have a workforce and a public health care system that can more efficiently and effectively serve the children who need it most.

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