



## Children's Oral Health Network of Maine

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### **Testimony of Kalie Hess**

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LD 1658 – An Act to Preserve and Strengthen the Fund for a Healthy Maine

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Public Hearing: January 7, 2026

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Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Kalie Hess and I am the Associate Director of the Children's Oral Health Network of Maine (COHN). Our network is made up of hundreds of organizations statewide dedicated to working collaboratively to ensure that all children grow up free from preventable dental disease. I am here on behalf of our Network to testify in support of LD 1658.

Dental disease is the most common chronic disease of childhood, and COHN is deeply invested in ensuring that Maine has the resources and capacity to provide strong oral health leadership. Our state faces significant access and workforce challenges that contribute to the persistence of this disease, and COHN has worked with the Legislature over the years to gradually rebuild Maine's capacity to treat oral health as the public health issue it truly is. Currently, the Maine CDC Oral Health Program is developing the first oral health strategic plan in over a decade.

COHN is concerned about the instability of state public health funding and the difficult decisions that will inevitably arise without a long-term plan for the Fund for a Healthy Maine. Reductions to the Fund could jeopardize Maine's ability to maintain critical prevention services, including the School Oral Health Program, and undermine recent, hard-won gains in rebuilding oral health capacity at the Maine CDC. These funds also play a crucial role in Maine's ability to leverage federal publichealth funding, as they can be used to meet matching requirements for federal grants. These concerns extend beyond oral health to every public health program that relies on the Fund to support essential services that keep Maine people healthy.

By increasing the cigarette and tobacco product tax and requiring a guaranteed minimum annual transfer beginning in FY 2027-28, this bill will provide greater stability for essential prevention programs across Maine and reduce the risk of year-to-year funding shortfalls that undermine public health efforts.

Stable, predictable funding is critical to sustaining effective prevention programs and achieving meaningful long-term health outcomes. By securing a reliable revenue base for the Fund for a

Healthy Maine, LD 1658 ensures that Maine can continue to invest strategically in programs that protect the health of children and communities across the state.

For these reasons, COHN strongly supports LD 1658, and urges the Committee to vote ought to pass.