



Children's Oral Health Network of Maine

www.maineconh.org

Testimony of Kalie Hess

Associate Director, Children's Oral Health Network of Maine

LD 2106 – An Act to Prohibit the Disclosure of Nonpublic Records Without Proper Judicial Review

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary
Public Hearing: January 28, 2026

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and members of the Judiciary 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 and individuals statewide dedicated to working collaboratively to ensure that all children grow up free from preventable dental disease. I am testifying on behalf of our network in support of LD 2106.

COHN partners work in schools, community settings, and clinical sites across the state to reach children who would otherwise go without care. School-based and school-linked programs are a cornerstone of this work because, for many children, school is the only place they reliably access health supports, including oral health care.

For children to benefit from these services, they must be able to attend school safely and consistently. When families are afraid to send their children to school, or when attendance is disrupted due to concerns about immigration enforcement activity in communities, children miss not only classroom learning but also critical health services delivered in those settings. We are already seeing how fear and instability in families' daily lives can translate into missed appointments, difficulty with follow-up care, and interruptions in preventive services that are essential to avoiding pain, infection, and more costly treatment later.

At the same time, the providers and programs working to serve these children are operating under growing strain. Community-based oral health providers, including those delivering care in schools, are experiencing increased operational challenges and costs related to navigating the current immigration enforcement environment. These can include additional administrative time, legal and compliance considerations, communication with families about safety and confidentiality, staff training, and disruptions to carefully coordinated school-based service schedules. All of this is happening within an oral health system that is already stretched thin by workforce shortages and long waitlists, especially for children enrolled in MaineCare.

Maine is in the midst of an oral health crisis. Only a fraction of children with MaineCare have a regular dental home, and many families face months-long or even year-long waits for care. By providing the support and protections outlined in this bill, the Legislature can help ensure that children can safely attend school. That, in turn, allows them to continue receiving the health services they depend on there. It also helps stabilize the providers who are on the front lines of delivering oral health care to vulnerable children, so that rising indirect costs and operational burdens do not force programs to scale back services.

For many children in Maine, school isn't just where they learn – it is their point of access to health care. For these reasons, we respectfully urge you to support LD 2106.