

**Senate and House Health and Human Services Committee
Public Hearing on LD 2123**

Submitted by:

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Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and Distinguished Members of the Committee:

My name is Cara R. Dionne. I am a Registered Dental Hygienist with a Master of Science in Education, and I serve as the Practice Manager and Operating Room Scheduling Coordinator at 207 Pediatric Dentistry, where we provide comprehensive dental care to children from across the state of Maine.

I am here today to strongly support LD 2123, *An Act to Improve Dental Care Access for Children by Modifying the MaineCare Reimbursement Methodology for the Provision of Anesthesia for Certain Dental Services*, because it directly addresses a growing and urgent access-to-care crisis for children enrolled in MaineCare.

At our practice, anesthesia is often **medically necessary**, not optional. Many of our patients are very young, have extensive dental disease, special health care needs, developmental delays, or severe anxiety that makes in-office treatment unsafe or impossible. For these children, deep sedation or general anesthesia is the only safe and effective way to deliver comprehensive dental care.

In 2025 alone, 207 Pediatric Dentistry treated over 200 children under general anesthesia. Currently, we have **125 children scheduled for surgery through April of 2026**, with another **75 children waiting to be assigned a general anesthesia date**. At the same time, we continue to **add approximately ten new patients every week** to this waiting list. These numbers reflect not overutilization, but significant unmet need. Furthermore, these numbers only represent our practice, not the other practices around the state treating children with similar dental needs. As the person responsible for both practice management and operating room scheduling, I see the operational impact of this demand every day. But as the person who also answers the phone and speaks directly with families, I see the human impact as well. I am often the one listening to parents call in distress while their children are crying at night in dental pain. I am also the person who has to tell them that, despite the urgency of their child's condition, we are currently booking surgeries six to eight months out. These are some of the most difficult and heartbreakingly conversations I have in my role.

Current MaineCare anesthesia reimbursement policies are a major contributor to this problem. Reimbursement rates often fail to reflect the true cost of anesthesia services, staffing, operating room time, and care coordination required for medically complex pediatric patients. Because anesthesia reimbursement is so low, it is not fiscally viable for additional providers to offer treatment for MaineCare patients at the Maine Dental Surgery Center. As a result, access is artificially limited—not due to lack of need or willingness to provide care, but because the reimbursement structure makes participation unsustainable. We have had other dental providers approach us asking about utilizing this space as it would allow them to treat more MaineCare patients.

While most of the patients we treat are young, our practice has also struggled with trying to find oral surgery options for teenagers covered by MaineCare who need their wisdom teeth extracted. Low anesthesia reimbursement rates for these procedures have caused most oral surgeons to limit their availability to MaineCare patients to the point this service is almost inaccessible even in the greater Portland area. We have had multiple providers capable of taking on this type of treatment request to use the facilities at Maine Dental Surgery Center.

Passing LD 2123 would directly address multiple barriers. By improving MaineCare anesthesia reimbursement, this bill would allow **more providers to safely and sustainably provide care at the Maine Dental Surgery Center**, increasing capacity and reducing wait times. Most importantly, it would help children **get out of pain sooner**, rather than waiting months for necessary treatment.

In closing, LD 2123 is about access, safety, and equity. Children covered by MaineCare should not have to endure prolonged pain or worsening infections because of reimbursement policies that limit provider participation. This bill represents a meaningful step toward ensuring that Maine's most vulnerable children receive timely, medically necessary dental care.

I respectfully urge the Committee to **vote Ought to Pass on LD 2123**. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Cara R. Dionne, RDH, MSED
Practice Manager & OR Scheduling Coordinator
207 Pediatric Dentistry