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Testimony in Support of LD 2123

My name is Julie Tucci, Executive Director of a nonprofit pediatric dental practice in northern Maine, and I am writing in support of LD 2123 to address the growing and deeply concerning wait list for pediatric dental patients who require care in a hospital operating room.

Across the state, children with severe dental disease—often very young or with complex medical, behavioral, or developmental needs—depend on access to hospital-based dental care under general anesthesia. However, hospitals are increasingly unable to meet this need. As a result, pediatric dental OR wait lists continue to grow, leaving children in pain and families with few alternatives.

A key policy driver of this access problem is inadequate reimbursement. Current reimbursement rates for pediatric dental procedures performed in hospital operating rooms often do not reflect the full cost of care. These cases require coordination among dental providers, anesthesiology, nursing, surgical staff, and post-anesthesia recovery units, all within a highly regulated and resource-intensive hospital setting. When reimbursement fails to cover these costs, hospitals must make difficult operational decisions to limit OR block time for pediatric dental cases in favor of services that are financially sustainable.

The consequences are significant. Children wait months, and in some cases over a year, for treatment while dental disease progresses. What begins as a manageable condition can escalate into infection, emergency department visits, missed school days, and long-term health complications. Parents are left to feel powerless to help their children who are in pain. These delays disproportionately affect low-income families and children who rely on public insurance, further widening health inequities.

LD 2123 represents an opportunity to address these structural issues by aligning reimbursement policy with the true cost of providing much needed hospital-based pediatric dental care. Improving reimbursement adequacy would allow hospitals to allocate appropriate OR capacity, reduce wait lists, and ensure timely access to medically necessary services for children across the state.

For these reasons, I urge the Committee to support LD 2123 and take a meaningful step toward stabilizing access to pediatric dental care in hospital operating rooms. Thank you for your consideration and for your commitment to the health of children and families across our state.

Respectfully,

Julie Tucci, Executive Director

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