



Children's Oral Health Network of Maine

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Testimony of Kalie Hess

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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

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Public Hearing: February 4, 2026

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 and individuals 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 2123.

Maine's children deserve timely, high-quality dental care, and access to this care should not be limited by insurance status or unnecessary bureaucratic barriers. Unfortunately, we know that children covered by MaineCare often face significant delays or are unable to obtain necessary dental treatment, especially when anesthesia services are required. This bill addresses a critical gap in our health care system by better aligning reimbursement policy with the real-world costs and clinical needs of these services.

We also know that children with MaineCare already face the steepest barriers to care. Currently, about four out of five children enrolled in MaineCare do not have a dental home where they are able to receive routine preventive and restorative services.¹ Even what most of us would consider the bare minimum – one cleaning and one exam per year – remains out of reach for the majority of these children.

When routine care is this difficult to access, children who need more complex treatment face even greater obstacles. The result is children living with pain longer than they should, difficulty eating or sleeping, missed school days, and dental problems that escalate instead of being treated early. Our Network partners see every day how untreated dental disease affects children's health, learning, and quality of life, and how much harder it is for families when care is delayed. We have come before you in the past to promote early intervention opportunities that can be delivered in schools and community settings (see: [LD 1746: An Act to Reduce Dental](#)

¹ <https://www.mainecohn.org/assets/stock/2024-Dental-Home-Utilization-Maine-Children.pdf>

Disease and Ensure Access to Essential Preventive Dental Care Among Maine Children, which awaits funding from Appropriations and Financial Affairs), and those efforts remain essential.

The reality is that we need policy solutions that address both the lack of preventive care and the lack of restorative care in order to make meaningful progress on this persistent challenge.

When the system provides the resources that are needed to treat kids, they get the care they need sooner instead of sitting on waitlists while their dental disease continues to progress. Along with prevention and early intervention efforts, this is how we begin to close persistent gaps in access to care. We urge your support of LD 2123 as an important step toward making sure Maine children can get the treatment they need.