



## Children's Oral Health Network of Maine

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### **Testimony of Becca Matusovich**, Executive Director, Children's Oral Health Network of Maine

In support of LD 2209 – Resolve to Direct the Department of Health and Human Services to Develop Innovative Models for the Delivery of Dental Services to Expand Access to Oral Health Care Throughout the State

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services  
Public Hearing: February 24, 2026

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Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson, and members of the Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services, my name is Becca Matusovich and I am the Executive Director of the Children's Oral Health Network of Maine (COHN). Our network involves over 100 organizations and individuals statewide working collaboratively to ensure that all children grow up free from preventable dental disease. I am here to testify in support of LD 2209. We have been working to develop and test multiple innovative models for oral health access and care delivery, and we would very much like to share what we have learned and to be included as a stakeholder in the proposed process.

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, far too many children face significant delays in treatment and are unable to obtain necessary dental care, languishing on waitlists or waiting months for appointments even for an urgent problem. Children with MaineCare, who represent about half the children in our state, face the steepest barriers to care. Currently, about 4 out of 5 children with MaineCare do not have an active dental home where they receive routine preventive and restorative services. Even among children with private dental benefits barely over half have been getting even the bare minimum of one cleaning and one exam per year.

This data, which doesn't even include adults, clearly indicates that the available providers do not have anywhere near the capacity needed to treat all the disease that is already out there. And if dental disease is not treated, it will progress, no matter how much you brush and floss; families cannot stop cavities without help from licensed professionals.

When routine care is this difficult to access, people who need more complex treatment face even greater obstacles. In one project we are supporting, a mobile dental program that provides

both school-based and clinic-based care made over 600 referrals of children to dental specialists last year. This organization provides comprehensive care all the way up through simple extractions, so the cases that have to be referred out are more serious and often require deep sedation or general anesthesia. So far in this project, only about 1 in 5 of these referrals have been able to secure a specialist appointment within 6 months after the initial exam.

The result is children living with pain, difficulty eating or sleeping, missed school days, and dental problems that continue to 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 both families and providers when care is delayed. We need policy solutions that address the shortage of care along the whole continuum - preventive, restorative care, and specialist care - in order to make meaningful progress on this persistent challenge.

A hub and spoke model, as referenced in LD 2209, would be a great approach to maximizing our state's limited oral health capacity and could help us organize pathways to care that can address people's needs in a more timely, affordable, and effective way.

Innovative care delivery models can help both kids and adults get the care they need sooner instead of sitting on waitlists while their dental disease continues to progress. By fostering these models, we can make faster progress on closing persistent gaps in access to care. We urge your support of LD 2209 as an important step toward making sure Maine's people can get the oral health care they need.