



190 Park Ave Portland, ME 04102 Phone 207.874.1028

ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE
www.communitydentalme.org

February 24, 2026

Senator Marks, Representative Mathieson, and members of the Committee:

My name is Melissa Watson, and I serve as Executive Director at Community Dental. We are a nonprofit dental organization with practices in five counties across Maine, serving patients from communities statewide. More than 70% of our patients are enrolled in MaineCare.

I am writing today in support of LD 2209.

Maine's oral health system is under increasing strain, and the data supports that reality. Our state has one of the oldest populations in the country, with a corresponding aging dental workforce. A substantial portion of practicing dentists are nearing retirement age. At the same time, rural counties across Maine continue to experience dental workforce shortages. Recruitment into high-MaineCare, rural settings is challenging, and retention remains equally difficult.

MaineCare enrollment has increased, and safety-net providers like Community Dental care for a disproportionately high percentage of these patients. We also see many privately insured patients who carry MaineCare as secondary coverage, a factor that affects reimbursement mix and financial sustainability for community clinics.

Extended wait times for care, particularly specialty and pediatric services, are not theoretical. They are a lived reality for Maine families and a measurable barrier to care.

Untreated dental disease also drives costly emergency department use. These visits are significantly more expensive than preventive care and do not resolve underlying dental issues. They represent avoidable costs across Maine's healthcare system.

One of Maine's most promising partnerships to date has been the expansion of the Tufts University AEGD Program at Community Dental.

Since the program's establishment in Maine more than 11 years ago:

- AEGD residents have provided thousands of additional patient visits annually, significantly expanding capacity in communities with high unmet needs.
- Retention of AEGD graduates in Maine has exceeded the programs original expectation, with 49% choosing to practice in Maine after graduation.
- The presence of AEGD residents has expanded Community Dental's ability to deliver care to underserved populations, including MaineCare enrollees, Medicare, and individuals with complex dental needs.

These outcomes are not isolated. National workforce research shows that residents trained in community-based settings are significantly more likely to remain in underserved areas post-training. Maine is already experiencing this trend through the Tufts AEGD partnership at Community Dental.

LD 2209 builds on this success by creating a framework to evaluate and scale additional delivery models that strengthen access, workforce sustainability, and preventive care.

LD 2209 does not impose a rigid solution. Instead, it allows a data-driven process to:

- Evaluate innovative workforce and care delivery models
- Improve rural and underserved access strategies
- Strengthen preventive care approaches
- Support long-term financial sustainability for practices serving high-need populations

Without action, Maine risks:

- Accelerated provider retirements without replacement
- Reduced MaineCare participation among providers
- Increased emergency department utilization for preventable dental conditions
- Widening disparities in rural and underserved communities

Oral health is not separate from overall health. It affects school attendance, workforce productivity, chronic disease management, and quality of life.

LD 2209 positions Maine to proactively strengthen its oral health delivery infrastructure rather than react to worsening shortages.

For these reasons, Community Dental respectfully urges you to vote Ought to Pass on LD 2209. Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,



Melissa M Watson
Executive Director

Melissa Watson
Community Dental Maine
LD 2209
See attached PDF file