

Testimony in Opposition to LD 2206

Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson, and Members of the Committee:

My name is Dr. Robert Belanger, and I am a practicing dentist in Farmington, Maine. I have been in practice for nearly eight years, and I respectfully urge you to vote Ought Not to Pass on LD 2206.

I completed four years of undergraduate education followed by four years at a CODA-accredited dental school before earning my doctoral degree. Those eight years were not simply academic credentials — they were structured, competency-based training designed to ensure that when I began practicing independently, I was fully prepared to diagnose disease, manage complications, and provide safe, irreversible care.

Dentistry is not observational medicine. We perform surgical procedures. We administer anesthetics. We diagnose infections, pathology, and sometimes oral cancer. The standardization provided by CODA accreditation ensures that every licensed dentist in Maine has met the same rigorous national benchmark.

LD 2206 creates an associate dentist license for individuals who have not completed a CODA-accredited doctoral program or its equivalent yet allows them to practice under general supervision. While the bill includes written practice agreements and oversight provisions, general supervision does not require a supervising dentist to be physically present. Written protocols cannot replace the depth of biomedical and clinical training that comes from a standardized doctoral program.

I also want to address the issue of access to care. Maine absolutely has access challenges. But we have a distribution problem — not a shortage-of-dentists problem. In recent years, Maine has added a significant number of dentists. The issue is where providers practice, particularly in rural and underserved areas.

Access should not be expanded by weakening licensure standards.

Creating a two-tiered licensure system risks confusing patients and lowering the uniform standard that protects the public. From a patient's perspective, a "licensed dentist" should mean the same level of education and preparation across the board. That consistency is one of the strengths of our regulatory system.

The six-year pathway to full licensure included in this bill is also concerning. Time in practice does not retroactively create educational equivalency. The foundational training either occurred or it did not.

As a newer dentist, I can say confidently that my education was essential in preparing me for the realities of independent practice. Complications happen. Medically complex patients present daily. Sound judgment is built on comprehensive training.

If we want to improve access, we should focus on solutions that address distribution — loan repayment programs, rural incentives, community clinic expansion, and workforce retention strategies — without altering the educational standards that safeguard patient care.

Maine patients deserve consistent, high-quality dental care delivered by practitioners who have met the same rigorous educational requirements.

For these reasons, I respectfully ask you to vote Ought Not to Pass on LD 2206.

Thank you for your time and consideration.