

# Maine Chapter

INCORPORATED IN MAINE

American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®



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Admin & Project Coordinator

30 Association Drive, Box 190

Manchester, ME 04351

office: 207-480-4185

[www.maineaap.org](http://www.maineaap.org)

## Testimony neither for nor against:

**LD 258 "An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2023, June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025"**

## Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services February 22, 2023

Good afternoon, Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, and the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Dr. Deborah Hagler. I am a resident of Brunswick, a pediatrician, the immediate past president of the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and a member of the Maine Medical Association.

The Maine AAP strongly encourages funding to address children's physical, mental and oral health initiatives in the budget. The pandemic exacerbated behavioral and mental health problems already on the rise prior to the pandemic's onset. Alarming according to the 2021 Maine Youth Integrated Health Survey, 35.9% of Maine's High School aged youth felt depressed and 18.5% seriously contemplated suicide. Unfortunately, the need for increased behavioral and mental health support is occurring at the same time that Maine is experiencing a significant shortage in our behavioral health workforce. As a result, many families are struggling to access care for their children resulting in an increase in Emergency Room visits, calls to crisis, and an increased burden put on schools.

Raising MaineCare's reimbursement rates for behavioral health clinicians is one important mechanism to address this issue. Identifying a funding source to support this work in schools and school-based health clinics is critical as we move forward in our work to address the needs of these youth. The Maine AAP strongly supports funding to continue the Maine Pediatric and Behavioral Health Partnership Program to support primary care clinicians to identify and care for children and adolescent behavioral and mental health problems in the primary care setting. We have legislation forthcoming to support this program, LD 231, "An Act to Support the Pediatric and Behavioral Health Partnership Program" sponsored by Representative Shagoury. We look forward to providing the Health and Human Services Committee with more details on the outstanding success of the program and our proposed improvements at the public hearing. It merits investment of state resources, and we urge both committees to prioritize this vital tool for pediatricians and primary care providers.

The pandemic has also delayed routine preventative care and maintenance care for chronic illness including oral health. Dental caries is the most common chronic medical illness of childhood. Pediatricians and other child health providers are grateful the legislature voted to expand the oral health program last legislative session to help Maine children and families. This expansion called for funding, which is not in the current proposed budget. As in behavioral health, there is an oral health access crisis, and this funding is a critical part of the solution. We are requesting you add the funding as indicated in the original fiscal note for LD 1501 from last session.

On behalf of the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics and the Maine Medical Association, please accept my sincere thanks for your hard work in making these important health initiatives for children and families a priority. To paraphrase Senator Markey- Youth are about a quarter of the population but 100% of the future. If we want to invest in Maine's future, we need to invest in its youth – and there is no more critical time than right now as we are seeing the need so acutely.

Thank you.