



**Testimony from the University of Maine System**  
**Presented by UMS Director of Government & Community Relations Samantha Warren**  
**Regarding LD 1026, *Resolve, To Direct the University of Maine System***  
***to Establish a Dental Therapy Degree Program, March 22, 2023***

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Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs: My name is Samantha Warren and I am the Director of Government Relations for the University of Maine System (UMS).

The University of Maine at Augusta (UMA) currently offers three allied dental-related degree programs:

- A three-year Associate of Science Dental Hygiene degree with the option to complete one additional year to earn a Bachelor of Science in Dental Hygiene;
- Maine's only Commission on Dental Accreditation (CODA) accredited dental assisting program, through which students earn a three-semester certificate or two-year Associate's Degree and are prepared to sit for the Dental Assisting National Board Certified Dental Assisting exam immediately upon successful completion of the certificate program;
- and an Expanded Functions Dental Assisting program, typically a two-semester pathway to allow individuals who already have at least one year of clinical dental experience and hold a dental assisting or dental hygiene credential to gain further skills, abilities, and employment and earning opportunity.

These programs are delivered at UMA's Bangor campus and Lewiston Center (located within the University of Southern Maine's Lewiston Auburn Campus). They include extensive hands-on clinical components through which our students prepare for the workforce and provide free and low-cost preventive and restorative services to community members including Veterans, members of the Maine National Guard and at-risk children without adequate access to dental care or lack of a dental home.

UMA's dental programs leaders are dynamic, closely connected to the field, and ever evolving and enhancing our offerings to meet the needs of Mainers and the practicing professionals who provide them dental care. For example, UMS successfully secured \$750,000 in Congressionally Directed Spending supported by Sens. Susan Collins and Angus King so UMA could bring dental education and community care services to Aroostook County through a partnership with the University of Maine at Presque Isle.

LD 1026 would direct UMA to establish Maine's first dental therapy program. There is much history here, including past pushback when UMA previously considered establishing such a program and the closure after less than five years of New England's only dental therapy program, which had been offered through Vermont's State College System.

The establishment of new university degree programs is the authority of legislatively confirmed UMS Trustees, in collaboration with university administrators and faculty, and with input from stakeholders.

Additionally, it is important for you to know that UMA's existing dental programs are extremely costly to operate due to low student-to-faculty ratios (typically 5:1), cost of supplies and equipment, and clinical facilities maintenance — as required by the rigorous CODA standards. While we do charge a differential tuition for these programs to help offset these expenses, given our commitment to student

access and affordability, our dental hygiene program is still less than half the tuition cost charged by the only private program in the state and has operating losses of approximately \$700,000 annually.

For these reasons, UMS cannot support LD 1026 as printed. However, we greatly appreciate Representative Mastraccio's support of UMA's dental education programs and her commitment, and that of her bipartisan cosponsors, to investing to expand their impact. And we share their desire to ensure our dental education programs continue to grow and evolve to meet Maine's dire need for more dental professionals, especially with the recent expansion of adult MaineCare benefits to cover most dental services.

If this Resolve was amended to instead direct UMA to study the feasibility of establishing a dental therapy program and make recommendations back to the Legislature, it would have our full support. This approach would leverage our existing efforts to strategically and sustainably expand UMA's dental education offerings and allow us to thoughtfully and creatively consider fiscally responsible approaches to strengthen Maine's dental workforce, including what internal and external resources and partnerships would be necessary to successfully implement new degree programs.

Thank you for your ongoing support of the University of Maine System. I welcome your questions.