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LD 2214: An Act to Make Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds and to Change Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025

Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services Public Hearing: February 26, 2024

Senators Rotundo and Baldacci, Representatives Sachs and Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services, my name is Charlotte Warren, I'm a senior associate at Moose Ridge Associates and I am a resident of Hallowell. The testimony I am presenting today is on behalf of my client, the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics – an association representing the pediatricians and pediatric subspecialists in Maine.

There are two key issues we would like to bring before you today as you consider the supplemental budget. The first is about ensuring **there is funding included in the budget to cover the provisions in LD 1837**, which was carried over from last session on the Special Appropriations Table and has unanimous support from the Health and Human Services Committee as well as the full Legislature.

Oral health is linked inextricably to our overall well-being, health, and quality of life. Chronic inflammation and disease in the oral cavity is linked to inflammatory processes in the body. The better you take care of your teeth the healthier your body will be. Sadly, for children, dental caries is the most common chronic illness of childhood. Many children lack access to routine dental care in Maine and this situation is especially dire as we have significant shortages in the dental workforce across the state.

Most importantly, this bill helps build our public health prevention infrastructure at the Maine CDC by making the temporary Oral Health Positions permanent.

The second key issue the Maine Chapter brings before you today is to strongly recommend the committee oppose Part NN, the repeal increased eligibility for the Medicare Savings Program, and stand by the critically important work done last session to reduce the financial insecurity of older Mainers. Pediatricians in our state regularly care for children who have a grandparent as a primary caregiver. Maine seniors are integral to the health and upbringing of the children in this state.

Around 16,000 Maine children live in homes where a grandparent is the head of household¹. The ability for these grandparents to be able to provide food, medications, and shelter for these children is paramount to the outcomes of some of the most vulnerable children in our state. At a time when bills are being heard in this Legislature to try to alleviate crises in the Office of Regional Child Protective Services (LD2097) and issues concerning lack of knowledge and information about foster children are being vocalized by foster parents², the importance of ensuring these grandparents have affordable premiums to be able to take on the burden of caring for children that they already know well cannot be overstated.

1. <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2019.S0901?q=S0901&q=040XX00US23&hidePreview=true&tid=ACSST1Y2019.S0901>
2. https://walkamilemaine.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/unsupported_wamits_report_121223.pdf

Even for grandparents not directly housing children in the state, there is an undeniable importance in the no cost childcare they provide for their grandchildren. A study last year in Maine estimated the state lost over 400 million dollars due to the childcare crisis, which even more worryingly only includes infants and toddlers up to the age of three³. Refusing to expand Medicare Savings Program eligibility could cause many grandparents to have to work longer hours in order to make ends meet, taking a vital resource away from working families – and more importantly – potentially impacting the health of children during a crucial time in their development.

Finally, there are older adults who are making incredible contributions to the wellbeing and upbringing of children in this state even outside of their own families. In Maine, we have hundreds of “Foster Grandparents” who provide countless hours of tutoring, companionship, and stability for children across the state⁴. This AmeriCorps-based program has income guidelines to qualify for the minor stipend involved, so expanding MSP eligibility would empower even more of these potential mentors to commit to helping raise the next generation of Mainers without fear of putting their own health at risk.

Across this state, elderly adults are crucial to the health of our youngest and most vulnerable in many ways, and at times those contributions can go unnoticed. Rejecting the proposed budget cut to MSP eligibility will show them that we value the efforts they continue to make to provide safety, wisdom, and comfort for our children.

Thank you for all you do to prioritize our children’s future.

1. <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2019.S0901?q=S0901&q=040XX00US23&hidePreview=true&tid=ACSST1Y2019.S0901>
2. https://walkamilemaine.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/unsupported_wamits_report_121223.pdf
3. <https://www.strongnation.org/articles/2173-the-growing-annual-cost-of-the-infant-toddler-child-care-crisis-in-maine>
4. <https://www.opportunityalliance.org/foster-grandparent-program>