

Chair Perry, Chair Bailey, Members of the Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services, my name is Nathan Oakes. I am a Maine licensed dentist with practices in Biddeford, South Portland, Portland, and Waterville, and I am testifying today in opposition to LD 2174.

Dental care is health care, and for many Maine residents, dental insurance is either nonexistent or severely limited, leading to significant out-of-pocket costs. I ask the committee to oppose this bill because it will impact access to dental care in the state. While health insurance garners significant attention, more than three times as many Americans do not have dental insurance as do not have health insurance.

Too often, people forego preventative dental care because of the costs. Skipping regular checkups and cleanings increases the chances of pain, infection, and complications like abscessed teeth. Without regular care, patients often seek treatment in the ER, where their symptoms are treated and released without any follow-up plan. This also leads to the need for more complicated procedures to treat more complicated issues, further driving up costs.

Every day in my practice, I see patients seeking us out solely because we accept and make it easy for patients to apply for flexible financing options that other offices do not offer. For many of these patients, financing options are the only way to afford critically important dental care. I appreciate the bill sponsor's concerns with patients not understanding the details of their financing, but there are ways to ensure patients are informed about the terms of their financing without banning certain products or making it harder for providers to help patients apply for and receive financing.

Deferred interest products have gotten a bad name, but they are valuable and have a place in the market. I would have gladly taken a deferred interest product on my student loans instead of paying amortized interest over the time it took me to pay them off.

I urge the committee to oppose LD 2174 and not close off financing options that help people access dental care. Instead, I respectfully request that the sponsors and the committee focus on solutions that ensure patients are informed and understand their financing terms instead of removing options that help them access care.

Thank You