

## Testimony In Favor of LD307

Good Afternoon Senator Baldacci Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. I am Dr. Jeffrey Walawender.

As a former executive director of six nonprofit dental clinics and frontline provider who has served Mainecare patients for over a decade, I am here to give my strong support for LD307. My testimony is rooted in years of experience within Maine's dental healthcare system and a deep commitment to improve access to quality oral healthcare for all Mainers.

The reason behind LD307 stems from a critical need to address the challenges facing Maine's dental benefit. While we have made strides in expanding coverage to include preventive and comprehensive dental care for adults since July 2022, our system remains burdened by administrative inefficiencies, limited provider networks, and inadequate customer service.

I have witnessed firsthand the struggles faced by Mainecare patients and providers alike. Despite the availability of a comprehensive dental benefit, there are few accessible places where patients can utilize these services creating an undue burden on the few that are open. The existing administrative framework is cumbersome, resulting in barriers to care and an overall lack of innovation in delivering oral health solutions across the state. I am quite certain every single person in this room testifying will tell you that what we currently have is not working and not close to meeting the needs of our state.

We have some of the pieces of a successful oral health program, but all these pieces need to be put together and held together by an organization with experience running dental benefits. The way a dental practice operates, bills, and schedules is incredible different and in some ways more complex than medical. Trying to standardize dental and pigeonhole us into medical as an afterthought has not and will not work.

Almost every single dentist on the board of directors at northeast delta dental has spent significant time working in a non profit accepting Medicaid. Our focus and drive behind this initiative is mission sensitive and easily the most foundational because its helping those who are most vulnerable.

Last year Northeast Delta Dental and Dentaquest took on the administration of the new dental benefit in New Hampshire. Currently New Hampshire has around 160 providers including 21 oral surgeons for 90,000 members while Maine has approximately 130 in a given month for 180,000 members. This highlights the difference having a dedicated team with experience in dental can have on the provider network.

To help with the administrative burden Delta and Dentaquest have dedicated provider support representatives that can help with contracting, adding providers, training, timely prior authorizations, and weekly claims payment. On the member side there is customer service available to help answer questions, provide resources on the plan and benefit information, and the ability to help connect with a provider in the community. Members have 24/7 access to teledentistry.com, which helps connect patients to a live dentist.

By enacting LD307 and entrusting a third party to administer the dental benefit, we can unlock the full potential of Maine's dental healthcare system. With streamlined administrative processes, enhanced provider network, and improved customer service, we can ensure that Mainecare patients receive the quality oral healthcare they deserve, regardless of their location or socioeconomic status.

I urge you to support LD307 to help start the conversation between all the partners in the state to transform Maine's dental benefit into a model of excellence and accessibility for all.

Jeffrey Walawender