

Testimony Neither in Support nor Opposition

LD 307, An Act to Lower the State's Health Care Costs

**Dr. Kailee Williams, DMD
President, Maine Oral Health Centers Alliance (MOHCA)**

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Dr. Kailee Williams and I am the president of the Maine Oral Health Centers Alliance (MOHCA), which consists of representatives from six of the largest non-profit dental centers in Maine including Waterville Community Dental Center, Kennebec Valley Family Dental, Jessie Albert Dental and Orthodontic Center, St. Apollonia Dental Center, Community Dental Center, and Mainely Teeth.

We understand that this bill would transition the current operations to a managed care plan, which is intended to lower costs and improve outcomes by contracting out the responsibility of oversight for the dental benefit. We appreciate the attention this bill brings to the current dental crisis, and while we have been advocating for much needed change and attention by the department to the dental access crisis, we have concerns that this solution, at this time, may not be the right one. Through our organization, we have met regularly to discuss and address the challenges that face our dental centers, our patients, and the community. It has been a priority for MOHCA to help and improve communication between dental providers and the State, and we have successfully obtained multiple meetings with MaineCare staff, advocates, and other stakeholders in an attempt to shed more light on the specific challenges and workable solutions that would be most effective. We are also aware that MaineCare has been working on internal reporting and evaluation of the dental benefit. We have advocated for the creation of a role within MaineCare that would be focused on the oral health care delivery and payment system, as we are aware that the dental system operates very differently than the medical system. We believe that there have been significant steps made to address the concerns that have been raised, but without a position in MaineCare that ensures there is someone who is devoted to understanding these challenges and differences, we fear that even our best efforts at improved communication and advocacy will not have the support and resources necessary to lead to effective change.

As a group that represents providers on the ground, delivering critical care around the state, we are acutely aware of the decimated provider network, dwindling access to specialty care, including multiple counties in the state that lack any access to urgent providers like oral surgeons and pediatric specialists. As a result, many of our practices are only able to allow a trickle of new patients to enter our centers, despite the near constant requests for care. The addition of an adult benefit, while necessary, added a significant volume of patients attempting to access care at a time where the already existing workforce shortage was worsened by the COVID-19 pandemic including front desk staff and administrators, dental assistants, hygienists,

and dentists. We are most concerned that changes at the pace required by this bill could further destabilize the network of existing providers. What we would ask is for organizations like ours and other critical stakeholders to have the opportunity to be more involved in the process if a transition of this magnitude were to occur. We have had little time to understand the nuances of this change and how it might affect our dental centers. Without adequate time and planning we fear there could be unintended negative consequences as the remaining providers are stretched incredibly thin. A complete overhaul of the system might be necessary but requires intentional discussion and collaboration with the stakeholders who will be the most affected by this change, who up to this point have not been actively involved.

Again, thank you for your attention to this incredibly important matter, we are encouraged that a discussion regarding access to dental services has reached this level and I am happy to answer any questions you might have.

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