



Testimony of the Maine Dental Association
before the Health & Human Services Committee

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

Neither for Nor Against

Public Hearing: Tuesday, March 5, 2024

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and Distinguished Members of the Health & Human Services Committee:

I am Therese Cahill and I serve as Executive Director of the Maine Dental Association. The MDA is a statewide association dedicated to advancing excellence in dentistry.

The MDA represents 85% of the dentists in Maine; there are approximately 775 practicing and retired dentists who are active members of the association.

On behalf of the Maine Dental Association, I am respectfully providing testimony *neither for nor against* **LD 307 An Act to Lower the State's Health Care Costs**.

Like so many professions across our State, our members are facing critical staffing shortages. On average, for the previous two years, it's taken approximately six months to fill a hygiene position. We have numerous practices across the State where dentists are the providers of hygiene services to their patients. Dental assisting positions present a challenge as well. As a result, right now, finding a dental home, regardless of how you are paying for services (self pay, commercial pay, or MaineCare), is difficult.

Following is an excerpt from a 2022 publication co-authored by the ADA's Health Policy Institute, the American Dental Hygienists Association, and the American Dental Assistants Association:

IMPACT OF WORKFORCE SHORTAGES ON DENTAL PRACTICE Staffing issues were cited as the most significant concern among dentists in January 2022 and remained the top concern in July 2022. This is consistent with other industries predominantly structured as small businesses, where – despite recent record-breaking inflation – workforce shortages remain the most significant problem. **The shortages have caused an estimated 11% reduction in dental practice capacity.** In July 2022, 4 in 10 dental practices indicated they were recruiting or had recently recruited dental assistants (DA), and nearly the same share indicated they were recruiting dental hygienists (DH). Among dentists recruiting for these positions, the vast majority – 9 in 10 – indicated it was “extremely” or “very” challenging. Additionally in July 2022, about 1 in 3 dentists who did not have full schedules indicated that vacant staff positions were at least part of the problem. Recruitment activity in dental offices and its associated level of difficulty have gradually increased over the two years that HPI has polled dentists on these topics.¹

¹ Dental workforce shortages: Data to Navigate Today's Labor Market (ada.org)

We're all aware that Maine, despite passage of an adult Medicaid dental benefit and a substantial increase to dental fees, continues to struggle with sufficient access to care. It is safe to say that no one believes the MaineCare dental benefit for both children and adults has no issues; our partners at the Office of MaineCare Services know there are challenges, the providers know, the advocates know, and most certainly, the patients know. Since the rollout of the adult benefit on July 1, 2022, the MDA has met many times with the Department on issues that have stymied access to adult MaineCare recipients. Most recently, the MDA has convened a MaineCare Task Force to discuss these issues and work toward potential resolutions. Along with the MDA, representation on this task force includes the Maine Dental Hygiene Association, the Children's Oral Health Network, dentists, independent practice dental hygienists, and office managers. With these stakeholders at the table, our hope is to put together a plan to bring to the Legislature in the next regular session.

We would ask the matter of this bill, dental managed care, receive the same level of conversations with stakeholders. We have lots of questions about this bill and have not been afforded the opportunity to have a discussion with the Sponsor given the timing of the release of the language. If the Committee and Legislature deems it appropriate, perhaps the issue before us today would be better served as a Resolve to study this matter so that all issues, possible other solutions, and stakeholder engagement could occur.

I'm happy to answer any questions and thank you for your time and attention.