



**Testimony of Kalie Hess, Associate Director
Children's Oral Health Network of Maine**

LD 1570: An Act To Prohibit Fluoridation of the Public Water Supply
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
Public Hearing: April 22, 2025

Good afternoon Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Kalie Hess, and I live in Southwest Harbor. I am here today on behalf of the Children's Oral Health Network of Maine and as a mom to twin 3-year-olds, and I urge you to oppose LD 1570.

As both a public health professional and a parent, I've seen how critical water fluoridation is—not just in theory, but in everyday life. My family lives in a community without fluoridated water. Even with my background in oral health, and even though we have insurance and reliable transportation, it has been an uphill battle to get my children the preventive care they need and deserve. On our community Facebook page, families regularly post about how hard it is to find dental care for their children. I've had neighbors tell me they can't find providers who will see their kids because they have MaineCare. My kids are only three, and it breaks my heart that from their friends' smiles I can already tell which children are unable to get care.

This isn't unique to Downeast Maine. Across the state, families face long wait times and a shortage of oral health providers, especially for children with MaineCare, who often wait more than a year for even urgent care. For the children who don't have regular access to dental care—which includes about 97,887 children with MaineCare and 36,662 children with commercial insurance—fluoridated water may be the only consistent protection they have against painful, preventable dental disease.¹

This is the challenge that members of the Children's Oral Health Network have taken on. We are a network of trusted organizations and individuals united by a shared vision: a Maine where all children can grow up free from preventable dental disease. Despite limited resources, our partners work creatively and persistently to bring quality oral health care to children across Maine in the midst of a growing oral health crisis.

Our network members hear concerns about fluoride every day, and we respect that those concerns often come from a genuine desire to protect one's family. It is incredibly unfortunate that one of our

¹ Fox, K. S., Kumarage, A., McGuire, C., & Stultz, E. (2024). *Assessing Maine children's access to a dental home: Dental insurance does not guarantee receipt of dental care*. University of Southern Maine, Muskie School of Public Service, Catherine E. Cutler Institute, Population Health & Health Policy. <https://www.maineconh.org/assets/stock/2024-Dental-Home-Utilization-Maine-Children.pdf>

most effective tools for preventing dental disease, especially in underserved communities, has become the target of widespread online disinformation. The truth is, community water fluoridation has been extensively studied for over 75 years, and the overwhelming consensus from scientists, doctors, and public health experts is that it is safe, effective, and especially important for children in rural and low-income communities.^{2,3,4} When we take it away, we remove a basic layer of protection that many children simply can't replace—as evidenced by the documented increase in cavities after fluoride was removed in communities like Juneau, Alaska; Calgary, Alberta – and by the lived experiences of families in my own community, which removed fluoride from our water in 2013.^{5,6,7}

I ask that you trust the professionals who have dedicated their careers to protecting the health of our communities, and that you recognize the strength of Maine's current fluoridation law. It respects local control while creating opportunities for trusted health providers to have real, fact-based conversations with their communities. Our law keeps the door open for these professionals to share accurate information and address concerns directly. Without it, those conversations are less likely to happen and misinformation is more likely to take hold.

This committee is well aware of the oral health crisis Maine is facing and has been a trusted partner in advancing solutions over the years. Please oppose LD 1570 so that Maine's communities can keep making their own decisions about whether their residents can continue to benefit from community water fluoridation.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I welcome any questions.

² Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2024). CDC Scientific Statement on community Water Fluoridation. <https://www.cdc.gov/fluoridation/about/statement-on-the-evidence-supporting-the-safety-and-effectiveness-of-community-water-fluoridation.html>

³ Iheozor-Ejiofor, Z., Walsh, T., Lewis, S. R., Riley, P., et al. (2024). Water fluoridation for the prevention of dental caries. Cochrane Library, 2024(11). <https://doi.org/10.1002/14651858.CD010856.pub3>

⁴ JADA Editorial. (2024). Community water fluoridation: A public health success. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.adaj.2024.10.003>

⁵ Kaur, G., Summers, J., & Ketchum, J. (2024, December 13). Calgary removed fluoride from its water supply. A decade later, it's adding it back. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2024/12/13/nx-s1-5224138/calgary-removed-fluoride-from-its-water-supply-a-decade-later-its-adding-it-back>

⁶ Larson, C. (2025, February 16). How going fluoride-free has impacted one Alaskan city. NPR. <https://www.npr.org/2025/02/16/nx-s1-5232176/how-going-fluoride-free-has-impacted-one-alaskan-city>

⁷ Ellsworth American. (2013, May 25). *Water fluoridation to cease on June 1*. Ellsworth American. https://www.ellsworthamerican.com/news/water-fluoridation-to-cease-on-june-1/article_dcfa9257-70ec-519d-b4b4-c0ddaa5697ec.html