



**Testimony by William Norbert  
Governmental Affairs and Communications Manager**

**Neither For Nor Against L.D. 1891**

***An Act to Address Dental Professional Workforce Shortage by Establishing  
Scholarship and Loan Programs and Updating the Dental Care Access Tax Credit***

**May 5, 2025**

**Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs**

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

My name is Bill Norbert. I am the Governmental Affairs and Communications Manager at the Finance Authority of Maine (FAME). I am presenting this testimony Neither For Nor Against LD 1891, *An Act to Address the Dental Professional Workforce Shortage by Establishing Scholarship and Loan Programs and Updating the Dental Care Access Tax Credit*. We take no position on Section 4 of the bill related to the Dental Care Access Tax Credit.

FAME's mission is to enrich business and educational outcomes through relevant, timely financial support to Maine's people. Our vision is a Maine where all people have access to improved economic outcomes through business growth and education attainment

This bill would establish within FAME the Dentists for Maine's Future Scholarship Program (similar to FAME's existing Doctors for Maine's Future Scholarship Program) at FAME to provide a tuition subsidy of 50% of the cost of attendance, up to a maximum of \$25,000 per student annually, for eligible students who enter dental school programs in Maine for the purpose of increasing the number of dentists in the state who practice in extreme shortage areas. The bill also would establish the Extreme Shortage Area Dental Education Loan Program to provide loans and loan repayment agreements to eligible dental students and individuals who are eligible for licensure as a doctor of dental medicine or as a dental hygienist, dental therapist, expanded function dental assistant, or dental assistant who agrees to serve an extreme shortage area in the state. The bill also would update the Dental Care Access Tax Credit to include eligible dental hygienists and changes the date that the tax credit is repealed to December 31, 2032

As you know, FAME administers a variety of grant, loan, and loan repayment programs to help meet Maine's workforce needs. Today we will be supporting a bill sponsored on our behalf by Representative Sargent, L.D. 1653, *An Act to Develop Maine's Credentialed Workforce*, that seeks to get a better handle on the various proposals for loan and loan repayment programs in a way that is efficient, cost-effective, and responsive to our state's current workforce needs. Under that bill, we would administer one all-encompassing workforce credentialing loan repayment program to provide us with more flexibility and efficiency while allowing us to address pressing workforce needs.

This session alone, there are at least six separate proposals to create new grant, loan, or loan repayment programs for FAME to administer. These cover occupations ranging from lawyers to dentists (this bill) to loggers and fishermen to recent college graduates employed in the trades (tool loans) to foreign trained physicians and state and federal workers (shutdown loans). If enacted and funded, these concepts would be added to the seven existing grant, loan and loan repayment programs we currently administer: Educators for Maine; Maine Health Professions Loan Program; Maine Health Care Provider Loan Repayment Pilot Program; Maine Veterinary Medicine Loan Program; Maine Dental Education Loan and Loan Repayment Program; the Nursing Education Loan Repayment Program; and the Foreign Credentialing and Skills Recognition Grant Program.

FAME is aware of the continuing need for dental professional services throughout most parts of the state. We have proudly administered the Maine Dental Loan and Loan Repayment Programs since their creation by the Legislature back in 1999-2000.

Section 2 of the bill proposes a Dentists for Maine's Future Scholarship Program, seemingly modeled on our existing Doctors for Maine's Future Scholarship Program. As you will recall, this Committee heard a bill sponsored by Senator Bennett earlier this session, LD 581, *An Act to Fund the Doctors for Maine's Future Scholarship Program*. That bill seeks to provide ongoing funds of \$300,000 to maintain the Doctors for Maine's Future Scholarship Program. The Committee voted 12-1 Ought to Pass As Amended on the bill. The Doctors for Maine's Future Program provides a \$25,000 scholarship annually for up to four years to Maine residents attending medical school at either University of New England College of Medicine or at Tufts University School of Medicine-Maine Medical Center Program (Maine Track Program). Schools must provide an equal number (match) of \$25,000 scholarships to Maine resident students attending the school.

Section 3 of the bill proposes a new Extreme Shortage Area Dental Education Loan Program to provide loans and loan repayment agreements to eligible dental students and individuals who are eligible for licensure as a doctor of dental medicine or as a dental hygienist, dental therapist, expanded function dental assistant, or dental assistant who agrees to serve an extreme shortage area in the state. This is quite similar to our existing Maine Dental Education Loan and Loan Repayment Program and may be unnecessary. The Maine Dental Education Loan, funded through Fund for a Healthy Maine allocation

of \$237,740 per year currently, provides a forgivable loan to Maine residents who are pursuing a postgraduate degree in dentistry. The Maine Dental Loan Repayment Program provides practicing dentists loan repayment. Under both programs, the dentist must provide dental services to Mainers living in underserved population areas without regard to their ability to pay. An education loan and/or loan repayment recipient with a new agreement signed January 1, 2020 and later can receive up to \$25,000. Effective academic year 2024-2025, the Legislature amended the program to include dental hygienists, dental therapists, expanded function dental assistants, and dental assistants. In FY 24, the Maine Dental Loan Program disbursed \$275,000 to assist eleven students (three initial loans and eight renewals). Students received awards ranging from \$10,000 to \$25,000 each.

FAME could administer these new programs should the Governor and Legislature approve them and provide us with sufficient funding to administer them. I note that there are no appropriations sections in the bill for the two proposed programs as currently drafted. Funding would be necessary for FAME to administer the programs. How much funding is up to you, but to help you think about it: for the scholarships, it would be \$100,000 total per awardee (\$25,000/year x 4 years), so 5 scholarships per year would cost \$500,000; for the loan/loan repayments, the maximum amount of a loan to or loan repayment agreement proposed in the bill for a program participant would be \$25,000 per year for a period of up to four years (\$100,000 per participant). If you wish to fund five dental students with loans annually, that would require \$500,000 per year (plus modest administrative costs for FAME) ongoing. Ten students per year would require at least \$1 million in ongoing funding. Loan repayments would require even more funding depending on the number accepted.

Some clarification would be appreciated regarding the return service expectation for scholarships proposed in Section 2 of the bill. Would a scholarship recipient be expected to practice in an "extreme shortage area" of the state upon graduation and, if they do not, would there be some negative repercussion such as a "claw back" or conversion of their scholarship to a loan with interest as set forth in the default section (lines 4-8 on page 4) of the loan/loan repayment program proposed in Section 3 of the bill. The notification section in lines 4-7 on page 2 requires monitoring by the schools of their employment for eight years after their graduation. We also respectfully request that you consider modifying language in the two funds sections (lines 16-18 on page 2 and lines 33-35 on page 3) to allow for FAME's "reasonable administrative costs" to be deducted from the funds as needed. The current language limiting us to only interest income on a yet-to-be-determined fund amount is likely insufficient.

Thank you for your consideration and I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.