

## Dental Workforce Shortage

Good morning, Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and the esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs.

My name is Representative Lucien Daigle, and I am here today to present 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.”**

Maine has a major dental worker shortage, especially for MaineCare patients. Only about 25% of general dentists in Maine accept MaineCare patients. This means only 141 dentists provide care for these patients. In 2023, Maine had a total of 761 licensed dentists, but some of these are no longer actively practicing or only work part time.

There are three sections in this bill that will help mitigate the dental workforce shortage.

#### **1 — Dentists for Maine's Future Scholarship Program**

This scholarship is a tuition subsidy for half the cost of tuition, up to a maximum of \$25,000 per student each year for eligible students who enter dental school programs in Maine to help increase the number of dentists in areas with an extreme shortage of providers.

An “extreme shortage area” is one of the following counties: Androscoggin, Aroostook, Franklin, Hancock, Kennebec, Knox, Lincoln, Oxford, Penobscot, Piscataquis, Somerset, Waldo, or Washington. Only three counties aren’t on this list.

Percent of Children with a Dental Home, (provider):

Washington county....15%	Piscataquis....18%	Aroostook....24%
Waldo....26%	Penobscot....26%	Oxford....26%
Somerset....27%	Androscoggin....27%	Franklin....29%
Hancock....39%	Knox....36%	Lincoln....39%
Kennebec....41%	York....43%	Sagadahoc....44%
Cumberland....45%		

Eligibility:

A student is or will be enrolled in a dental school program in this State.

Student has substantial connection to the State as evidenced by factors such as:

- Prior education in this State.
- A parent residing in this State.
- At least one year of residence in this State for purposes other than education.

Priority is given to an eligible student who meets at least 2 of the following provisions:

- The student has received a high school diploma, or its equivalent, in this State.
- The student has received a bachelor's degree from a 4-year college or university in this State.
- A parent of the student maintains the parent's legal residence in this State.

This benefit will only be available to Maine students.

The University of New England College of Dental Medicine is Maine's only dental school, and this scholarship will help encourage more Maine students to attend this school. Since the scholarship must be used in Maine, the money will stay in the state. The dental school must procure matching funds raised through philanthropic and private dental education fundraising thereby increasing the number of scholarships available to eligible students. The school must provide no fewer than the same number of scholarships allocated to the program by the State in a given academic year. At a minimum, this effectively doubles the impact of the state's investment.

A non-lapsing, interest-earning, revolving fund, known as the, Dentists for Maine's Future Scholarship Fund, will be created to carry out the purposes of this section.

Dentists for Maine's Future Scholarship Fund may receive, invest and expend on behalf of the fund money from gifts, grants, bequests and donations or other sources in addition to money appropriated or allocated by the State. Money in the fund must be invested, as provided by law, with the earned income to be added to the fund. Money received on behalf of the fund, except interest income, must be used for the purposes of this section; interest income may be used for such purposes or to pay student financial assistance administrative costs incurred by the authority.

## **2 — Extreme Shortage Area Dental Education Loan Program**

Loans are available to Maine residents enrolled in a dental school program or enrolled in any accredited school in a program of study for dental hygienists, dental therapists, expanded function dental assistants or dental assistants.

A loan repayment agreement is available to a person who is eligible for licensure as a doctor of dental medicine or as a dental hygienist, dental therapist, expanded function dental assistant or dental assistant in this State and who has outstanding dental education loans.

Eligibility:

Applicants must meet these minimum requirements:

- A student must be a Maine resident.
- A student must be enrolled in a dental school program or in any accredited school with a program of study for dental hygienists, dental therapists, expanded function dental assistants or dental assistants.
- A student must agree to serve an extreme shortage area.

Priority is given to a student:

- Who previously received a loan pursuant to this section.
- Who exhibits financial need.

After January 1, 2026, the maximum loan or loan repayment amount available is \$25,000 per year for a period of up to 4 years.

A loan recipient who does not obtain loan forgiveness shall repay the entire principal of the loan plus simple interest at a rate to be determined by rule of the authority.

Interest does not begin to accrue until the loan recipient completes the recipient's dental education.

A person who serves as a doctor of dental medicine, dental hygienist, dental therapist, expanded function dental assistant or dental assistant in an extreme shortage area is forgiven 25% of the original outstanding indebtedness for each year of practice as long as the recipient continues to serve as a doctor of dental medicine, dental hygienist, dental therapist, expanded function dental assistant or dental assistant in an extreme shortage area.

Credit for practice in an extreme shortage area must be awarded for each consecutive 12-month period served.

Loans must be repaid over a term of no longer than 10 years.

Repayment must commence when the loan recipient completes, withdraws from or otherwise fails to continue the recipient's dental education.

Recipients must serve patients regardless of the patients' ability to pay through insurance or other payment source. They will treat MaineCare patients.

A recipient who fails to complete the period of service required to pay off the loan is liable to the authority for an amount equal to the sum of the total amount paid by or on behalf of the authority to or on behalf of the recipient

### **3 — Dental Care Access Credit.**

This is an update to existing law.

- Extreme shortage area replaces underserved area.
- Eligible Dental Hygienist is added.
- Beginning in 2025, the oral health program shall certify up to 10 eligible dentists and up to 10 eligible dental hygienists each year rather than just 5 dentists.
- An eligible dentist or eligible dental hygienist determined to be eligible on or after January 1, 2018, but before January 1, 2032, is allowed a credit, not to exceed \$6,000 in the first year, \$9,000 in the 2nd year, \$12,000 in the 3rd year, \$15,000 in the 4th year and \$18,000 in the 5th year, against the taxes due under this Part.
- The credit may be claimed in the first year that the eligible dentist or eligible dental hygienist meets the conditions of eligibility for at least 6 months and each of the 4 subsequent years.



# Federally Designated Dental Health Professional Shortage Areas

