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## Testimony in SUPPORT of LD 1746, An Act to Reduce Dental Disease and Ensure Access to Essential Preventive Dental Care Among Maine Children

### Committee on Health and Human Services

May 6, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and Esteemed Members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Madeleine DesFosses, and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. The Maine AAP is a professional organization of 300 pediatricians and pediatric subspecialists dedicated to protecting the health of Maine children and adolescents. We are in strong support of LD 1746, which seeks to improve the oral health of Maine children.

Dental disease is the most common chronic disease in children. If left untreated, dental disease can impact the overall health of the child and can lead to academic interruptions. Access to dental care is crucial to preventing and treating tooth decay, and ensuring good oral health. However, thousands of Maine children go without routine dental care because there is no available dental provider in their communities, or in surrounding areas. In fact, in 2022, only 35% of Maine children with dental insurance coverage had an active dental home (1), highlighting the dire need for increased dental care access in our state.

I frequently hear from our members, particularly those who work in primary care settings, that they are consistently seeing children with tooth decay and dental disease on a daily basis. It is frustrating for these providers when they refer a patient's family to a dentist knowing well that the patient may not receive the dental care they need due to challenges actually getting into the practice for care. Imagine instead if the provider could manage basic dental issues right then and there in the primary care office and refer only when advanced care is needed, or if the child could access the care they need through a mobile dental care unit at their school.

This bill has three main components that would be a game changer for children's oral health in Maine, including supporting comprehensive mobile dental care in coordination with the Maine's CDC School Oral Health Program, and protecting Maine CDC's oral health capacity. However, I'd like to focus the remainder of my testimony on the component that seeks to equip primary care providers to apply Silver Diamine Fluoride (SDF) and manage other basic dental issues in primary care settings. SDF is a liquid medication applied with a brush by a trained professional to a cavity to prevent, slow or stop tooth decay. Because primary care providers see

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children far more often than dentists, they can be vital in stopping cavities before they get worse and start to have repercussions for physical health and academic performance. Maine pediatricians and primary care providers are eager to help provide this care, and this bill would give them the technical support they need to feel comfortable and confident in doing so.

It's time to make children's oral health a priority by implementing creative policy solutions that meet children and families where they are. Oral health care is not a privilege or a frivolity, it is an absolute need that can impact the overall health, quality of life, and education of a child.

We strongly urge the committee to vote "Ought to Pass" on LD 1746.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Madeleine DesFosses

Advocacy and Public Health Manager, Maine AAP

## References:

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