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

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Good afternoon, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Kathy Kilrain del Rio, I use she/her pronouns, and I'm the Advocacy and Programs Director for Maine Equal Justice, a nonprofit legal aid provider working to increase economic security, opportunity, and equity for people in Maine. Our organization has decades of experience working with people with low incomes to support access to health care, food security, housing security, education and training programs, and other programs that support individuals and families in moving toward financial security so they can thrive. I'm testifying in support of LD 1746.

Dental care is health care. It's essential for our physical health, mental health, self-esteem, and overall wellbeing. MEJ has worked on improving access to oral health care for Mainers with low incomes for decades. And in recent years we've been before your committee and others on multiple occasions to look at ways to address the continuing challenges that make it hard for too many Mainers of all ages to get the oral health care they need.

I've had the honor of working with many oral health providers and experts over the past six years and have learned a lot about the state of our oral health workforce. There are many smart and dedicated people trying to advance solutions that will change the landscape of care for the better so every Mainer – no matter the type of health care coverage they have – can access this essential health care. This bill would advance two of those solutions. We have to be open to looking at new ways of doing things if we really want to address access because we simply do not have enough oral health care providers in Maine or across our country. It will take time to grow the workforce, but our children's health can't wait.

In Maine, 2 out of 3 children with insurance – either private insurance or MaineCare coverage – do not have a dental home. That means they are not getting at least one exam and one cleaning a year. When children do not have access to this basic preventive care, they are more likely to get cavities and other issues that can cause pain, infection, and tooth loss. However, while too many children still do not access annual well-child visits with a primary care provider, a majority do.<sup>1</sup> By providing additional technical support through the Maine CDC for primary care providers to administer silver diamine fluoride treatments to stop the progression of cavities, we

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<sup>1</sup> <https://kidshealthcarereport.ccf.georgetown.edu/states/maine/>

can help more children get this important care option through their primary care provider who they are likely to see more frequently than a dental provider.

Another important tool we can use to address the provider shortage is to create more access through schools – the most reliable place to connect with children. This bill would create a model to provide additional preventive care and disease intervention services in schools through mobile dental services. This model has proven to successfully improve access to these vital dental services for children. By requiring DHHS to expand this to each public health district, we can significantly improve access for Maine kids – both for those accessing care through this model and by freeing up other providers in the community who can then see children who need more complicated care in a more traditional setting.

We've appreciated the ongoing understanding by members of this committee about the importance of oral health care across our whole lifespan. Your commitment to continuing to improve access to oral health care has been consistent – as was most recently demonstrated by your votes to support lines in the proposed budget that would make permanent two oral health positions at the Maine CDC. This bill also includes these positions so there can be multiple legislative vehicles to ensure our capacity at the Department to address oral health issues continues to grow.

For these reasons, we strongly urge you to pass LD 1746. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I'm happy to answer any questions.