
To the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

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

May 6, 2025

Senator Ingwerson, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Jakob Giron, Policy Advocate at Consumers for Affordable Health Care, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that advocates the right to quality, affordable health care for every person in Maine. As designated by Maine's Attorney General, CAHC serves as Maine's Health Insurance Consumer Assistance Program. Our toll-free helpline fielded nearly 7,300 calls and emails this past year from people across Maine needing help with their private healthcare or with accessing affordable healthcare services. CAHC also serves as the Ombudsman program for Maine's Medicaid program, MaineCare, and helps people apply for and navigate the enrollment process for MaineCare.

Between 2018-2020, the percentage of children enrolled in MaineCare who had visited the dentist over a one-year period fell from just 58% in 2018 to only 40% in 2020. Data from a 2019 study by the Partnership for Oral Health in Maine revealed the areas in which we can improve oral healthcare outcomes for children in Maine; Nearly half of the children screened in the study had a history of tooth decay, and approximately 25% had untreated decay. The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated these issues, resulting in fewer in-office visits¹ and higher risk for psychological stress-related dental conditions,² highlighting the need for sustained, enhanced support for school-based oral health initiatives.

The US Health Resources and Services Administration reports that, with the exception of one, parts of all counties in Maine are designated as dental care provider shortage areas.³ The Center for Disease Control reports that oral health is essential to general health and well-being. Oral health disease, a leading health problem, can cause symptoms that result in problems with eating, speaking, and learning, often impacting social interactions, academic achievement, and job potential.⁴

The Maine CDC's School Oral Health Program has been key in combatting the current shortfall by providing essential services, including oral health education, assessments, screenings, and preventive care to students across the state. In the 2023–2024 school year, the program visited 229 schools and

¹ <https://www.maineconhn.org/assets/docs/2020-COHN-Data-Brief.pdf>

² Choi, S E et al. "Impact of COVID-19 on Dental Care Utilization and Oral Health Conditions in the United States." *JDR clinical and translational research* vol. 9,3 (2024): 256-264. doi:10.1177/23800844231165016

³ <https://data.hrsa.gov/topics/health-workforce/shortage-areas>

⁴ [Oral Health Facts | Oral Health | CDC](#)

screened 13,287 students. 33% of those students were referred to further dental care.⁵ The State's investment in children's dental healthcare has already directly translated into the improved health outcomes of children.

While progress has been made, dental disease remains the most common type of chronic disease in children.⁶ There are also known disparities in the treatment of this disease. A 2023 survey from the Indian Health Service, which is the Federal Health Program for American Indians and Alaska Natives, examined rates of dental decay in children ages 6-9. The survey found that minority populations, particularly American Indians and Alaskan Native children, suffer from increasingly higher rates of dental decay, with American Indian/Alaskan Native children facing the highest rates of decay at an estimated 90%.⁷

This bill seeks to address these disparities and get to the root of this issue by significantly broadening access to dental care, which will empower primary care doctors, mobile dental clinics, and providers in the community, such as schools, to provide some basic dental services to children. Opening new, effective pathways to dental care will help ensure that more children in Maine have equal access to quality and affordable care.

Thank you for your time and consideration on this issue. CAHC recognizes the critical need to address oral health concerns among children and we urge the committee to vote in favor of LD 1746.

⁵ <https://www.mcd.org/focus-areas/featured-projects/school-oral-health-program>

⁶ [Big Hopes for Little Teeth | National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research](#)

⁷ https://www.ihs.gov/doh/documents/surveillance/Data_Brief_IHS_6-9_Year_Olds_2023.pdf