

Testimony of Judith Feinstein
Board Member, Maine Children's Alliance
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

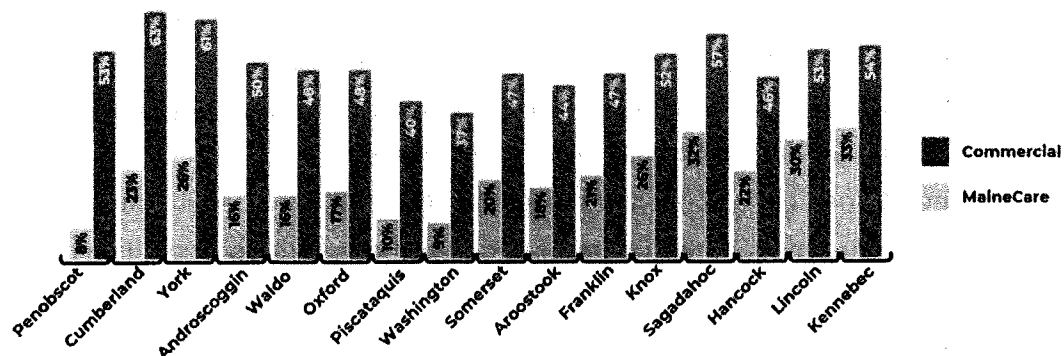
Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Judy Feinstein. I serve as a board member of the Maine Children's Alliance (MCA), which works to promote sound public policies and promote best practices to support the health, safety, and well-being of children, youth, and families in Maine. I offer testimony on behalf of MCA today in support of LD 1746.

This bill takes important steps to stop dental disease early, expand access to preventive care, and strengthen Maine's public oral health infrastructure.

Regular dental care is vital for children, promoting oral and overall health. Tooth decay is among the most common chronic health issues among children and, if left untreated, can lead to pain and difficulty eating; lack of dental care can interfere with school readiness and attendance. To ensure good oral health, it is essential for children to have a dental home by the end of their first year. Routine dental care can be provided at a dental office, school, or community-based clinic.

Children's dental coverage in Maine, both public and private, has increased in the last 5 years. Dental coverage does not equal access to care, however, as only 1 in 3 (35%) children with consistent dental coverage have an active dental home. Commercially insured children are more likely to have a dental home than those with MaineCare. Factors contributing to a lack of dental care are a decrease in dentists (10%) and dental hygienists (19%) from 2019 to 2023 and the second-lowest dental provider Medicaid participation rate in the country (16%).¹

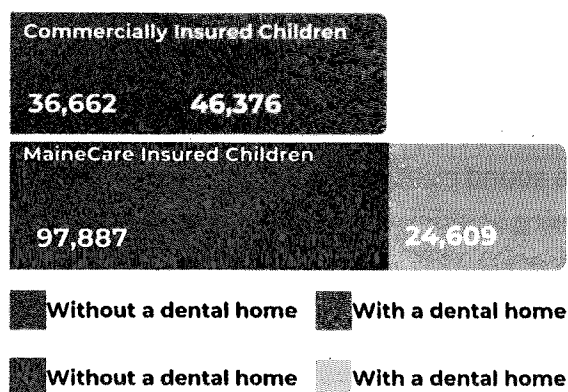
In Penobscot County, commercially insured children are 6.6 times more likely than children with MaineCare to have a dental home.
Percent of consistently insured children who had a dental home, by county and payer (2022)



Source: Assessing Maine Children's Access to a Dental Home (2024)

Statewide, children with commercial insurance were 2.8 times more likely to have a dental home than those with MaineCare (56% vs. 20%).

Number of insured children with and without a dental home (2022)



Source: Assessing Maine Children's Access to a Dental Home (2024)

While long-term solutions are underway, immediate actions are needed to stop disease progression for children and ease the pressure on Maine's limited dental workforce. This bill takes important steps to address oral health needs of Maine children now, by:

1. Empowering primary care providers to address dental needs
 - a. Equipping primary care providers to apply Silver Diamine Fluoride (a cavity-stopping treatment) and manage basic dental issues by creating capacity through the Maine CDC to provide technical support.
 - b. Primary care providers see children more often than dentists, making them vital in stopping cavities quickly.
2. Supporting comprehensive mobile dental care in coordination with the CDC School Oral Health Program
 - a. Replicating a successful, enhanced model integrating local dental providers into schools, offering children more comprehensive services.
 - b. While it can be sustained by insurance reimbursement, this model needs startup funding to be adapted in other counties.
3. Protecting Maine CDC's capacity to meet Maine's critical oral health needs
 - a. Makes permanent two limited-period positions to support public oral health services in the state.

Access to oral health care is essential for Maine children to experience overall health that also ensures they can participate in school and academic success. We encourage the committee to support this important legislation to improve access to dental care for Maine children.