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SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

February 4, 2026

**TESTIMONY OF SPEAKER RYAN D. FECTEAU REGARDING LD 2123, An
Act to Improve Dental Care Access for Children by Modifying the
MaineCare Reimbursement Methodology for the Provision of Anesthesia
for Certain Dental Services**

Good afternoon Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Committee on Health and Human Services. I am House Speaker Ryan Fecteau, and I have the privilege of representing my hometown of Biddeford.

I am here today to present LD 2123, *An Act to Improve Dental Care Access for Children by Modifying the MaineCare Reimbursement Methodology for the Provision of Anesthesia for Certain Dental Services*.

I'm sure it is no secret to this committee that many families covered by MaineCare struggle to find dental providers. Providers who accept MaineCare often have long wait lists, and because they are harder to find, families may face significant travel times to access services.

This bill intends to alleviate just a bit of that suffering.

Across the state, many children on MaineCare lack a "dental home," meaning they do not have a dentist they see regularly for cleanings and other preventative care. Without this routine maintenance, curable issues – things like cavities – turn into surgical events. This leaves families with no option but to seek care elsewhere.

Luckily, providers across Maine are rising to meet the need, offering restorative dentistry through ambulatory surgery centers. I was approached by one of these providers, Dr. Michael Dowling, who opened his own ambulatory surgery center for children, 207 Pediatric Dentistry in Yarmouth, after experiencing the significant wait times for operating rooms at hospitals. But the procedures needed to treat severe dental issues require anesthesia, and the hourly rate that providers are reimbursed by MaineCare for these anesthesia services is less than the hourly rate of an anesthesiologist. This forces the dental provider to take money from the dental work to cover the cost of the surgery, leading to a large gap between demand and procedures that can actually be done.

These providers, like Dr. Dowling, are working hard to make the lives of children better. But the current reimbursement rates from MaineCare are making it challenging to operate their businesses and provide the dental care that Maine kids need. This means there is a backlog of children on waiting lists, many of whom are waiting months or even a year to receive services, suffering with tooth pain.

LD 2123 proposes a targeted increase to MaineCare reimbursement rates, increasing the rates for anesthesia services provided to children at ambulatory surgery centers, as long as those centers cover at least 50% MaineCare patients. As a result, these centers will be able to continue their operations, increase capacity, and reduce wait times.

Currently, we believe that this will help two ambulatory surgery centers in the state help more children, but we also believe that fair reimbursement rates will incentivize other centers to create a sustainable payer mix of MaineCare and non-MaineCare patients, with the hope of expanding access statewide. So, even though it may look like a small bill, it is an important one too, and is a strong tool that will increase access to dental care.

I will also note that this bill was drafted as an act to allow the committee for more flexibility should they wish to amend it. While this bill is currently focused on children, I would also fully support an amendment to include Mainers of all ages based on testimony from others and the will of the committee.

Access to care is critical. We know that this bill is only part of the solution. We must also work in tandem on upstream solutions, like this committee did in passing LD 1746 last year, to increase access to preventative dental care so that children don't need surgery in the first place. But this is an important step towards making sure that children with urgent needs can access the care that they need, when they need it most.

Fair reimbursement means a healthier Maine.

And together they create a Maine, where no matter your income, you can live a life you deserve.

I am proud to sponsor this bill, and I urge you to pass it.

Thank you for the opportunity to offer this testimony. I would be happy to take questions.