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State of Maine | 132nd Legislature  
Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services  
Testimony of Lori Dwyer on behalf of Penobscot Community Health Care

February 24, 2026

**In support of:**

*LD 2206, An Act Expanding Access to Oral Health Care by Creating a New Path for Obtaining a License to Practice Dentistry*

Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson, and members of the Committee, I am Lori Dwyer, President & CEO of Penobscot Community Health Care (PCHC). Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in strong support of LD 2206, *An Act Expanding Access to Oral Health Care by Creating a New Path for Obtaining a License to Practice Dentistry*.

PCHC has championed this issue for the last year and a half because we live it every day. We are not speaking hypothetically. We are speaking on behalf of tens of thousands of Maine patients who cannot access care.

LD 2206 is not a rushed or experimental proposal. It is the direct result of the Commission to Expand Access to Oral Health Care by Studying Alternative Pathways for Obtaining a License to Practice Dentistry — a body created by this Legislature last year after LD 1615 was converted to a resolve. I commend the Legislature for insisting on a thoughtful, evidence-based process.

Over the course of multiple meetings, the Commission heard testimony from regulators, educators, providers, workforce experts, and public health leaders. It examined best practices from other states, including Massachusetts, where a supervised licensure pathway for foreign-trained dentists has been operating for decades without compromising patient safety.

LD 2206 reflects that work.

Maine faces a severe and growing access crisis. As the leader of Maine's largest Federally Qualified Health Center, I am responsible for more than 700 employees and nearly 60,000 patients across 22 clinical sites.

Our dental practice alone serves thousands of patients annually — and turns away thousands more because we simply do not have enough dentists.

Patients drive hours for appointments. Parents bring children in pain. Emergency departments are treating dental conditions that should have been addressed in routine care settings. These are not isolated anecdotes — they are daily realities.



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This bill maintains quality while expanding access. Opponents will again attempt to frame this proposal as lowering standards or exposing vulnerable populations to inferior care. That claim is not only inaccurate — it is offensive to the clinicians and organizations that deliver care to Maine’s most underserved communities.

PCHC leads the state in quality oversight. As a Federally Qualified Health Center, we are subject to rigorous federal reporting, accreditation standards, quality assurance programs, and patient safety requirements that exceed those applied to most private practices. As an FQHC, we report cost and quality data to HRSA every year and are held accountable by the federal government and our AAAHC accreditation standards to ensure high quality. HRSA and AAAHC provide strong oversight – reporting, regular site visits, and comprehensive clinical and operational standards. In addition, to qualify for Federal Tort Claims Act (FTCA) immunity, FQHCs like PCHC must build and maintain extensive quality, safety and risk management programs, reporting on program outcomes every year to the federal government.

The suggestion, therefore, that we would hire substandard providers to care for our patients is misaligned with reality, demonstrates a thorough misunderstanding of the internal and external rigor applied to FQHCs.

We would never support a pathway that compromises patient safety.

LD 2206 does the opposite. It establishes an associate dentist license that requires a dental degree, passing required examinations, practice only in approved settings, general supervision by a Maine-licensed dentist, a detailed written practice agreement, and accountability to the supervising dentist. It also creates a pathway to full licensure only after 6 years of demonstrated safe practice.

Evidence from other states shows this works. Massachusetts has long allowed foreign-trained dentists to practice under supervised limited licenses in public health settings such as community health centers and hospitals.

Workforce reality demands action. We are increasingly seeing qualified dentists trained outside the United States applying to work in Maine. Many have completed U.S. residencies and passed the same examinations required of domestic graduates. Yet current licensing barriers prevent them from practicing here. They go elsewhere. Meanwhile, Maine patients wait.

This is about patients, not professional turf. Protecting the status quo will not solve Maine’s access crisis.

PCHC is not asking for special treatment. We are asking for the tools to serve our patients responsibly.

LD 2206 offers a balanced, carefully studied solution: maintain standards, protect patients, expand the workforce, and increase access to care.



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As some of you know, until July 2022, PCHC ran the only general dentistry residency program in the State of Maine, which continued for over a decade. PCHC also operated the only pediatric dental residency program in Maine for years, which ended a few years prior to the general residency program. We trained and graduated close to 100 dentists into the marketplace, many of whom are still practicing in Maine. As one of the nation's first teaching health centers, PCHC has always placed strong emphasis on continuous learning and excellence at our dental practice, and that has historically included, in addition to the oversight laid out above, careful oversight of new/training dentists and the associated quality assurance. Our high standards are in fact the reason why we believe so strongly that a pathway to full licensure for these dentists that requires six years of general supervision by an experienced dentist makes good sense – and is something that would maintain high standards for clinical care.

On behalf of Penobscot Community Health Care and the patients we serve, I respectfully urge you to vote Ought to Pass on LD 2206.

Thank you very much for your time and the work you do for the State. Please reach out to me if you have any questions. I am happy to answer any additional questions you may have.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lori Dwyer", is written over a white background.

Lori Dwyer, Esq.  
President and CEO  
Penobscot Community Health Care

# DENTAL CENTERS

provider capacity



| LOCATION  | OPERATORIES | CURRENT PROVIDERS   | ADDITIONAL PROVIDER CAPACITY               | ESTIMATED ADDITIONAL ANNUAL ENCOUNTERS |
|---|-------------|---|--|--|
| Bangor Dental Center  | 41          | 4 dentists<br>3 hygienists<br>1 periodontist<br><i>(3 days/week)</i><br>2 orthodontists<br><i>(10 days/month total)</i> | 8 dentists<br>8 hygienists                 | 37,800                                 |
| School-Based Health Centers*  | 2           | 1 dentist<br>1 hygienist  | 2 dentists                                 | 2,124                                  |
| Belfast Dental Center<br><i>(opening April 2026)</i>  | 8           | --  | 2 dentists<br>4 hygienists                 | 12,950                                 |
| <i>*Two of PCHC's School-Based Health Centers have dental clinics with shared providers: Downeast School (Bangor) &amp; Brewer Community School</i> |             |   | <b>12 DENTISTS</b><br><b>12 HYGIENISTS</b> | <b>52,874</b>                          |

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- PCHC's 51 operatories across its dental network lacks sufficient providers to meet patient demand.
- 24 additional providers would enable the network to operate at full capacity, generating roughly 53,000 more patient encounters annually.
- Increasing staffing to full capacity would significantly expand access to care.

## Additional annual encounters methodology

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### Bangor & Belfast Dental Centers

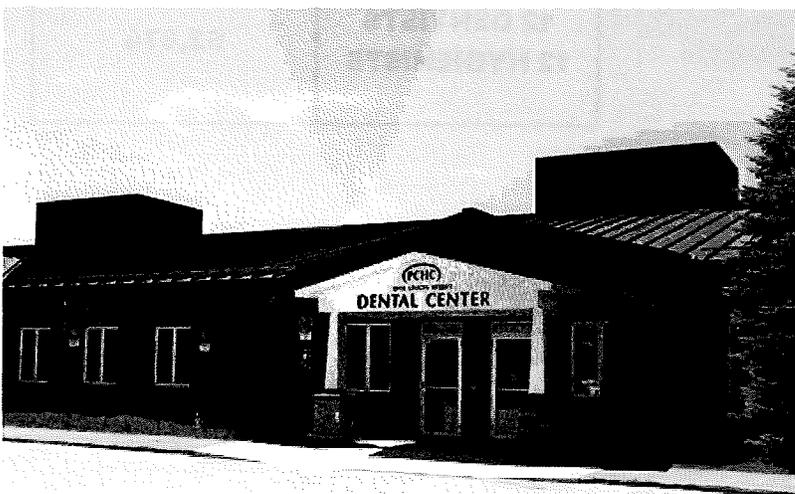
- 208 working days minus 13 holidays and 5 weeks of vacation = 175 days
- Annual **Dentist** Encounters:
  - Per Dentist: 17 daily encounters
    - **2,975 encounters a year**
- Annual **Hygienist** Encounters:
  - Per Hygienist: 10 daily encounters
    - **1,750 encounters a year**

### Bangor Downeast School SBHC Dental Clinic

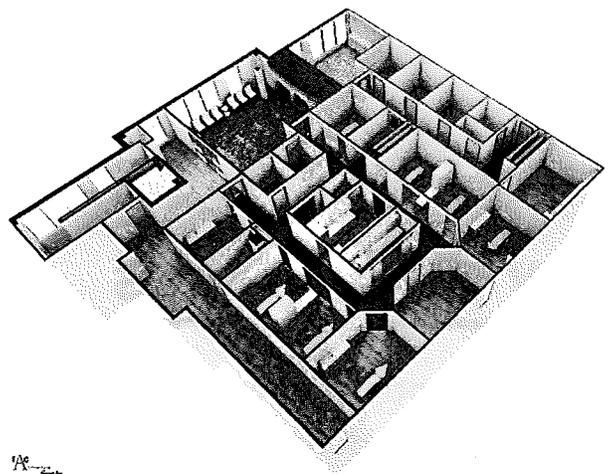
- 260 working days minus 13 holidays, 18 weeks summer vacation and 5 weeks of vacation = 132 days
- Annual **Dentist** Encounters:
  - Per Dentist: 6 daily encounters
    - **792 encounters a year**

### Brewer Community School SBHC Dental Clinic

- 260 working days minus 13 holidays and 5 weeks of vacation = 222 days
- Annual **Dentist** Encounters:
  - Per Dentist: 6 daily encounters
    - **1,332 encounters a year**



**Bangor Dental Center**



**Belfast Dental Center**  
*(opening April 2026)*