



Christian Civic League of Maine

Associated with Focus on the Family

Senator Volk, Representative Herbig, distinguished members of the Joint Committee on Labor, Commerce, Research and Economic Development, my name is Carroll Conley, and I am the executive director of the Christian Civic League of Maine. I am here to speak in favor of LD 1514.

About two years ago, I proposed to our Board of Directors that we look for causes to support beyond of our usual advocacy scope. I felt it was important that those outside of our circle of influence understand that while our traditional issues were very important to us, there were other concerns we cared about that also reflect our mission.

Under that premise, our Board Chair asked if we might consider supporting the dental therapy bill, noting that one of the bill's sponsor was a strong ally of ours on other issues central to our mission.

One of my board members, Dr. Chris Ritter, a highly respected physician in the Bangor area, enthusiastically approved the concept making the case that many doctors had opposed physician assistants with the same arguments dentists are now using against dental therapists. Doctors' fears that physician assistants would create a financial and safety threat proved to be unfounded.

Today, the data from Alaska and Minnesota has proven those same accusations against dental therapists are totally unfounded as well.

Two weeks ago, my wife and I were invited to go to Minnesota to observe a Native American dental clinic and a clinic focusing on dental care for the elderly, physically challenged, and underprivileged children. I also attended several panel discussions which included dentists in private practice who were either opposed to or skeptical of the dental therapist concept prior to its implementation. Those dentists now employ dental therapists and extolled the benefits of the program for their clients and the financial advantages to their practices.

The visit to the clinics illustrated the importance of the "hub and spoke" model which allows clinics to fully maximize the potential of their mobile units. The fact that a dental therapist, under the general supervision of a dentist, can lead a mobile team to veterans' homes, schools, and nursing homes totally convinced me of the necessity of LD 1514. We went to Minnesota in favor of LD 1514. We came back as enthusiastic, passionate supporters. As my apolitical wife said one evening, "Why would anybody oppose this?"

Finally, before becoming the executive director of the Christian Civic League, I was a headmaster for 13 years in Massachusetts and Maine, serving on the Maine Principals' Association executive committee and as the president of the Northeast Regional Principals Association for six years. When I heard that CODA created its accreditation standards this August, as an educator, it only made sense that we as a state would conform, thus necessitating LD 1514.

Change is often difficult, and I admit there is a certain safety in that inertia. It is not my intent to vilify those who are generally fearful or uninformed about this change, but this is not uncharted waters -- yes, this is change -- but it is proven progress. For the sake of the less fortunate among us, I urge you to vote "Ought to Pass" for LD 1514. Thank you for the opportunity to speak, and I'll be happy to answer any questions.