

Written Testimony in Support of LD 1026 to the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and Members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

My name is Dr Steve Mills and I am speaking in support of LD 1026, to establish a Dental Therapy Degree Program in Maine.

I am a Board Certified Pediatric Dentist and have served the people of Maine since 1987. I am now at a point in my career where I can view the children's oral health needs in our state from a broader view than when I was just starting out. I have been involved with the wonderful Children's Oral Health Network of Maine which tries to support creative initiatives to enhance our children's abilities to access good oral health. This has given me the ability to serve more children than I ever could in my office alone.

I will try to give my *personal perspective* on how our most vulnerable children try to access care here. You all are well aware of the percentages of children who are covered under MaineCare as well as those who are uninsured or otherwise find it difficult to afford to connect with a dental professional. It often falls to the so called "Safety Net" clinics whether traditional Non Profit Low Income Centers or FQHC's to see a great number of these children. Recruiting, engaging and maintaining qualified dental professionals to work in these centers is challenging.

We have experience here in Maine with a Dental Therapist in one of these clinics and she was an excellent addition. She became an important part of the team and provided care well within her abilities. Because of the situation she would have been under constant supervision and her work was thought to be above adequate.

I am one who believes that a new team member to the staff of a dental center could prove extremely useful. I also believe that a trained therapist would be an excellent clinician and do many of the things that the routine patient needs leaving time for those with increased training to do more complicated procedures.

Putting an excellent education program here would help many clinical entities in the State as well as creating a resource for the rest of New England. It is hard, as you might imagine, to recruit someone from Minnesota to come to Maine and to expect them to love it as much as we do.

Let's face it, educating someone here is certainly going to lead to more qualified dental personnel remaining here. We would be doing this for us but also for the entire country.

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