

Testimony of Courtney Vannah, Program Manager, Oral Health Initiatives, MCD Global Health
for LD 1026: Resolve, To Direct the University of Maine System to Establish a Dental Therapy
Degree Program.

Before the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee
Public Hearing: Wednesday March 22, 2022

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, I am pleased to offer testimony in support of LD1026. I am the Program Manager of Oral Health Initiatives at MCD Global Health, a dental hygienist, and a lifelong resident of rural Maine. I am submitting testimony to encourage the Committee support this bill to direct the University of Maine System to establish a dental therapy degree.

The statistics in Maine show a dire need for dental workforce expansion. Far too many of Maine's residents go without dental services of any kind, and even fewer have access to restorative dental care. To increase the dentist workforce numbers to a level adequate enough to support the oral health needs of *all* Mainers it would mean essentially doubling the current number of practicing dentists, which is wholly unrealistic to expect at this juncture in time. While many efforts have attempted to alleviate the burden on the existing dentist community, one of the most promising efforts was stopped short of its full potential to impact access to care.

Nearly a decade ago, the distinguished members of the State of Maine Legislature moved to allow a new provider type to join the dental workforce in Maine, the dental therapist. In other states, this provider type has proven its potential to expand the restorative dental workforce and make a significant impact on access to care issues by alleviating the burden on existing dental providers. Sadly, almost a decade has passed, and Maine has *still* not provided the training program necessary to support those wishing to pursue this model of care delivery. Almost weekly, professional partners ask me about hiring a dental therapist, and I am embarrassed to tell them that even after this many years, there still is no training program, and therefore no active pool of applicants for these positions.

It is very important that we support this bill to finally move forward and finish what was started so many years ago. Thank you for your consideration of my testimony on this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Courtney E. Vannah". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Courtney E. Vannah, IPDH, MS, MPH
Program Manager, Oral Health Initiatives
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