



**Written Testimony of Jess Maurer on Behalf of
The Maine Council on Aging
To Joint Standing Committee on Health & Human Services**

**In Favor of LD 441 – An Act to Expand Adult Dental
Health Insurance Coverage**

Submitted in Writing on March 18, 2021

Senator Sanborn, Representative Tepler and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services:

My name is Jess Maurer and I'm the Executive Director of the Maine Council on Aging (MCOA). The MCOA is a broad, multidisciplinary network of more than 100 organizations, businesses, municipalities, and older community members working to ensure we can all live healthy, engaged and secure lives with choices and opportunities as we age at home and in community settings. I am writing in support of LD 441.

For us to live healthy lives, long into older age, we must have access to preventative health care services, including oral health services. The mouth and teeth are connected to the rest of the body! Preventative care ensures we don't develop diseases and serious, more costly, health problems that are avoidable. Nationally, 1 in 5 people over 65 have untreated tooth decay and two thirds have gum disease. And cancers of the mouth are primarily diagnosed in older adults. There is also a correlation between poor oral health and increased rates of diabetes, stroke, and heart disease. Poor oral health can impact mental health, the immune system, and medication efficacy. A lack of dental attention can also negatively impact communication and social interaction.

While there are many reasons why everyone, including older adults, need access to comprehensive oral health care, the lack of dental insurance is a major access barrier to dental care for many Mainers generally and for older adults in particular – nearly 70% of older Americans currently have no form of dental insurance. Medicare does not provide dental coverage (except in some Medicare Advantage Plans or Medigap Plans which are often too expensive for low-income older Mainers to afford). So any movement to expand dental coverage for the Maine population, as LD 441 proposes, would increase access to these important health services for older adults.

LD 441 represents one step toward closing the gap between general health insurance coverage and dental health insurance coverage and would enable more older Mainers to get the oral health care they need.

We urge you to vote in favor of LD 441.

Thank you.

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