

## **Testimony of Dr. Hank Ford**

### **Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services**

### **In Support of LD 595, Resolve To Ensure That Access to Oral and Facial Ambulatory Surgical Centers in Maine Remains Viable**

#### **Sponsored by Senator Stewart**

**March 25, 2021**

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Hank Ford. I am a board certified oral and maxillofacial surgeon and I have lived and practiced in Presque Isle for over twenty years. I am also the director of the Northern Maine Oral & Facial Surgery. Our practice includes a Medicare Certified Ambulatory Surgery Center, the only such facility of its kind in the entire state of Maine. I am testifying today in support of LD 595.

Our practice covers all manner of oral surgery services from bone grafts, to cleft lip and palate work, impacted and wisdom teeth removal, repairing facial trauma, among many other procedures. Our patients come from all over Maine. We have patients who regularly make the trip from Bangor because they do not have access affordable oral and maxillofacial treatment in that area. Indeed, some of our patients come from as far away as Kennebunk.

The challenge of providing quality medical services in Aroostook County is unique. Our county, like many of the collar counties in Maine, is medically underserved. But in many respects, all of Maine is underserved especially as regards oral and maxillofacial services.

We are also unique in that we have an ambulatory surgical center, or ASC, as part of our practice. It is an incredible resource. Many dental procedures such as facial fractures, traumas, difficult dental extractions and oral pathology can be done safely as an outpatient procedure and the patient can be discharged the same day. In addition, these procedures can be done in our ASC at a fraction of the cost that would otherwise be charged in a hospital. Many of these patients pay for these procedures out of pocket and it can be ten to twenty times more expensive in a hospital. For people in County, who oftentimes have to travel to Bangor to receive medical assistance, having this resource is critical to their recovery.

Quite a few of the patients we treat on a daily basis have a compromised medical history, the ASC allows us to treat these patients here in the surgery center. NMOFS Ambulatory Surgical Center provides a safe anesthetic management option for patients of all ages requiring medical and dental procedures. Our surgical team maintains

advanced cardiac and pediatric life support certifications. At NMOFS our staff is at your side from the preoperative through the recovery period. The Medicare/Medicaid and AAAHC certified ASC allows us to provide surgical care for our patients in a convenient and private setting. This also allows a high degree of cost control, privacy and scheduling convenience. Keep in mind that I do keep a full schedule here at the Surgery Center and also go to the hospital, where I am on staff, to operate several times a month. Extremely medically compromised patients as well as surgeries that require an inpatient stay are always done at our local hospital.

The challenges of maintaining an ASC of our level are quite significant. Yearly costs, re-certifications and building upgrades required have a large financial impact on the surgery center. Our highly skilled team also requires yearly certifications to maintain their required trainings, all of this comes at a cost. Our goal is to care for patients with a more convenient alternative than hospital-based outpatient procedures and that requires equipping the center with the latest technical equipment.

Future of Dental Care in underserved communities is of great concern. On average, only 200 – 300 Oral Maxillofacial Surgeons graduate every year. Recruitment to maintain or add services is already an extreme challenge in a rural area such as ours. NMOFS Ambulatory Center is the only free-standing ASC owned by an Oral Surgeon in New England, and quite possibly the only one on the East Coast. We get calls daily from dentists and providers from all over the State with questions/concerns and a need to get their patient to an Oral Surgeon quickly. An increase in the facility fee rate would allow this practice to see more MaineCare patients in a timely manner without compromising the quality of care or causing financial hardship to the Surgery Center. Without this Surgery Center, I believe you would see our Emergency Rooms getting flooded with dental problems requiring patients to be admitted to the hospital as an inpatient or being transported to Bangor or Portland for their oral needs.

Thank you in for the opportunity to testify. I'd be happy to answer any questions and will attend the work session.