

Testimony of Abusana Bondo in support of LD 1501: An Act To Protect Oral Health for Children in Maine
Health and Human Services Committee

April 26, 2021

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Committee on Health and Human Services: My name is **Abusana Micky Bondo** and I am the co-founder of In Her Presence and a school board member at Portland Public Schools. In Her Presence empowers immigrant women in Maine, and my work in education is focused on making learning more student-centered. We serve families who are facing Acculturation as result of immigration, which affects children oral health, and when children have dental problems it affects their ability to learn. ~~Are there any other personal details that you'd like to share that you feel are relevant to your perspective on this bill?~~ I am here in my personal capacity and informed by my experience to speak strongly in favor of LD 1501: An Act to Protect Oral Health for Children in Maine.

Through my work at In Her Presence, we have learned that Immigrant families are facing language, cultural and financial barriers that, consequently, limit their access to and use of dental services. Children of newcomers women are suffering from poor oral health and face several barriers to use of dental care services. The disparity in dental caries between children of newcomers and the mainstream children can be reduced by improving their parents' literacy in the official language(s) and educating parents regarding good oral health and how to accessing .ing-services for the children which since they were most of the time disqualify or discriminatethe parents aren't eligible for dental care.

~~{oral health services are needed, education about how to get oral health services is needed, any observations that you have about oral health needs among immigrant women who are part of your programs, focused on children more specifically}~~. By expanding the School Oral Health Program, we can be sure that all children are getting oral health screenings, prevention, education, and connection to further care if they need it. These services are important to immigrant families who are new to navigating Maine's oral health care system. It can be confusing for people to learn how to get care here, so having support through a screening and follow-up recommendations can help people learn about how the oral health care system works in Maine as well as how to ensure their children can get services they need.

From my experience working in the education field, I know that children face a lot of barriers that make it harder for them to learn. Unfortunately, dental pain is one of the most common reasons why students miss school or why they can't focus even if they are physically in class. Untreated dental decay (cavities) can result in difficulty eating or speaking, and poor appearance, all of which present challenges for maintaining self-esteem and attentiveness to learning which increase chronic absenteeism and negatively impact academic achievement . ~~(Any observations you have from this perspective?)~~. In order

for children to show up at school ready to learn we need to ensure they have certain basic needs met – and oral health care is one of those needs.

Ensuring that children can get screenings and preventive oral health screenings in school will help set all children – and especially immigrant children – up for success. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in favor of LD 1501.

Abusana Micky Bondo

Co Founder In Her Presence

School Board Member , District 1

Abusana Bondo
Portland

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