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Testimony of the  
Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention  
Department of Health and Human Services

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

LD 1501 An Act To Protect Oral Health for Children in Maine

Sponsored by: Representative Gramlich  
Hearing Date: Monday, April 26, 2021

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and Members of the Committee, my name is Nicole Breton. I serve as the Director of the Rural Health and Primary Care Program, a program of the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention, an Office of the Maine Department of Health and Human Services. I am here today to provide information on behalf of the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention related to LD 1501, *An Act To Protect Oral Health for Children in Maine*. Maine CDC is neither for nor against LD 1501.

This bill amends the current statute in several ways. First, the bill expands the Maine School Oral Health Program (SOHP) to all schools in the State. The SOHP is one of many activities implemented by staff at the Maine Center for Disease Control and Prevention (Maine CDC). It provides a range of services including oral health education, oral health screening, fluoride treatments, dental sealants, and assistance with care coordination to a dental home. In order to direct services to schools where children are most likely to have difficulty accessing dental services, eligibility for School Oral Health Program enrollment has been based upon grade level as well as the proportion of students that are eligible for the Free and Reduced Lunch Program at each school. The services and educational programming offered at each school are determined locally. Funding is currently available for participation at approximately 200 elementary schools the majority of which are located in rural areas of the state.

Second, the bill directs the Department to begin a pilot project for an oral health value-based payment model within MaineCare that includes prevention, early intervention, disease management and care coordination services for oral health services delivered in schools and early child care settings in the payment model.

Finally, the bill provides funding for one Health Program Manager to fulfill the role of Oral Health Coordinator within the Maine CDC, Rural Health and Primary Care Program, to lead Maine's public health functions related to oral health. This position has been vacant since 2015 when all of the funding lines that were dedicated to the Oral Health Program were redirected to other positions within the Maine CDC by the previous Administration.

The Maine CDC offers the following information for consideration.

Tooth decay is the single most common chronic childhood disease, occurring five to eight times as frequently as asthma. Oral health problems affect our ability to eat certain foods, the way we communicate, how we view ourselves, and how others perceive us.

A major theme of the Surgeon General's Report on Oral Health is that oral health means much more than healthy teeth and gums. It means being free from oral pain, oral cancers, birth defects, and other diseases or problems that affect our daily functioning. Children who have decay, abscesses, and chronic dental pain are more frequently absent from school. In fact, more than 51 million school hours are lost each year to dental related illness. Students often cannot concentrate on, nor excel in, their schoolwork and are unable to actively participate in their learning environments.

There are many barriers to dental care that cause children to needlessly suffer from dental disease. These include cost, lack of transportation, lack of knowledge about the importance of preventive care, language and cultural differences, and fear.

School-based oral health programs are just one way to overcome these obstacles and ensure equal access to oral health services for all children. To eliminate the oral health disparities that we currently see across the state and to ensure the oral health of children as well as older Mainers, it will take a strong infrastructure at the state level. A crucial component of the state structure is a dedicated leader who can:

- Provide leadership;
- Educate and empower;
- Mobilize partnerships;
- Develop policies; and
- Evaluate program effectiveness.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide information about the impact of this bill to expand the Maine School Oral Health Program, strengthen the state's public health infrastructure and endeavor to find creative ways to lower costs and improve access to care for all.