

Testimony by Ilmi Carter, MSN, RN, NCSN, School Nurse  
In support of L.D. 1501, An Act To Protect Oral Health for Children in Maine  
Monday, April 26, 2021

Good afternoon, Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Ilmi Carter, and I have been a school nurse for the Rockland schools since 2005. I currently work at Oceanside High School in Rockland. The six schools in RSU 13 serve the towns of Rockland, Thomaston, Owls Head, South Thomaston and Cushing. I have enjoyed working as a school nurse in several of the local schools over the past 16 years.

Families in many communities in Maine struggle to provide adequate dental care to their children. Our school's free and reduced rate is greater than 60%, with one school close to 80%. About 14% of Rockland's residents live in poverty and 44% of children are enrolled in MaineCare (Knox County Health Profile, 2018). This data outlines the financial stress our families live with.

Knox County does not have any dental homes that are open to MaineCare families. I have recently completed a research project on dental insecurity in Maine where I was fortunate to receive information about MaineCare's rate system evaluation study. When MaineCare updates the rates that will hopefully encourage more dental offices to begin accepting MaineCare patients. However, the need is now and on-going.

In my school system, our elementary schools have been fortunate to be able to participate in the state School Oral Health Program, but our middle school and high school have not been able to. We have a mobile dental hygienist who comes to school to see a few students who have MaineCare and no dental home. This is far from adequate. The need is greater than this one hygienist's ability to provide care for all students who are enrolled in MaineCare.

LD 1501, if enacted, will allow for the expansion of more dental providers to provide necessary oral health care to the underprivileged families. Dental care should not be a luxury.

I want to thank you for allowing me to speak in favor of LD 1501. The increase we are seeing in poor nutrition, self-esteem and absenteeism have a direct interaction with lack of dental care. This bill will support families in obtaining and maintaining a basic human need.

I hope you will vote to pass LD 1501.

Respectfully,

Ilmi Carter  
Oceanside High School, School Nurse