

Norma J. Desjardins, DMD  
Presque Isle, ME  
[njdesj@gmail.com](mailto:njdesj@gmail.com)

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Testimony in support of LD 1501, An Act to Protect Oral Health for Children in Maine

Dear Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and Distinguished Members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

I am a general dentist and the director of St Apollonia Dental Clinic, a nonprofit dental home for approximately 4000 Aroostook County children. I write this note not as the clinic director, but rather from my personal observations and experience gained from 29 years of practice and service in the County.

I am writing to express my SUPPORT of LD 1501. This bill would do several things to expand oral health services: 1) expand the school oral health program so that it could serve all schools in Maine, and 2) establish an oral health coordinator at the Maine CDC (which we have not had for a handful of years now). It would also instruct MaineCare to pilot a value-based purchasing initiative for school oral health services to explore ways to invest in these services differently and maximize federal match dollars for them.

There are many reasons why this is a good idea for the citizens of the State of Maine.

In the first half of my career, in private practice, I saw many patients and families who *could* afford to come into our dental office. Then I served on the Health Advisory Council for ACAP, and I soon became aware of the many, many (300+) Head Start students who began the school year reporting they did not have a dentist to go to. I decided to establish St. Apollonia Dental Clinic to provide a dental home for those children who did not have access to one. This Clinic has been in operation for over 9 years and provides a full time, comprehensive, quality, caring dental home for thousands of children.

Unfortunately, there are still thousands of children we are not reaching. They are invisible to us. There are those who will never have a dental visit until they have an urgent issue and end up in the local E.R. It is imperative that there is a system in place to locate and provide resources and services for these children. Hence, many children will benefit from having programs in schools, receiving consistent preventive care and with a better possibility of being referred to and finding a dental home. LD 1501 addresses a real problem and provides real solutions. Thank you.

Submitted by: *Norma Desjardins DMD*