



April 26, 2021

LD 1501, “An Act to Protect Oral Health for Children in Maine”

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Lyvia Gaewsky and I am the Program Management Specialist for the From the First Tooth program. I am writing in support of LD 1501: An Act to Protect Oral Health for Children in Maine.

From the First Tooth is a statewide children’s oral health program funded by the Partnership for Children’s Oral Health and administered by MaineHealth. For the last 10 years, From the First Tooth has worked to increase access to preventive oral health care by integrating oral health evaluations, oral health risk assessments, and fluoride varnish application into primary care settings for children ages six months to four years.

Early childhood caries is the most widespread, chronic, infectious disease among children in the United States. In Maine, approximately four out of ten children will have a cavity by the time they reach third grade. The consequences of untreated tooth decay include pain, infection, impaired speech, delays in learning, problems with eating, and reduced quality of life.

If a child is unable to access regular preventive dental services, dental care is often postponed until symptoms, such as toothaches and facial abscesses, become so acute that care is sought in hospital emergency departments. The latter consequence of failed prevention is not only wasteful and costly to the healthcare system, but also rarely addresses the true problem, as few emergency departments deliver comprehensive dental services. School-based oral health programs increase access and serve as an early



intervention to prevent the need for expensive, last-minute triage care. Providing health services for children in schools, where they spend the vast majority of their waking hours, is a proven public health success story and is practical and fiscally responsible.

Dental pain is relatable. We all have stories of how dental pain has caused discomfort in a spouse, child, or friend. A story that has stuck with me over the years was shared by a second grade teacher serving a low-income school in Hancock County. The teacher recalls a student coming up to her in the middle of the day's activities and saying they were unable to concentrate due to a toothache. Without other options, the teacher sent the child to the nurse's office for pain reliever. The next week, again during the middle of a lesson, the same child approached the teacher and said they are unable to concentrate due to dental pain. Expanding school-based oral health programs can break this cycle, thereby improving Maine children's quality of life and their ability to succeed in school and contribute to a vibrant economy and society in the future.

Please support the children of Maine by voting in favor of LD 1501.

Thank you.

On behalf of From the First Tooth,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lyvia Gaewsky', written in a cursive style.

Lyvia Gaewsky, MPH
Program Management Specialist, From the First Tooth
LGaewsky@mainehealth.org
207-662-6309