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Testimony of Rep. Lori K. Gramlich presenting

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

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and distinguished colleagues of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, I am Lori Gramlich, Representative for House District 13, which is the town of Old Orchard Beach. I am honored to present **LD 1501, An Act To Protect Oral Health for Children in Maine.**

As some of you may know, in addition to my work in state government with the Department of Health and Human Services, I also worked for a number of years with the City of Portland Public Health Division, directing the Family Health Program. Part of my responsibilities included oversight of the Children's Oral Health Program. I saw firsthand the incredible work done for kids in need of oral health care.

Unfortunately, over the last decade, we have seen many of our effective prevention-based programs endure a multitude of cuts to the point of these programs no longer being effective. The Children's Oral Health Program is but one of these impacted programs.

Because the system is not working, here's what's happening: We are failing to prevent oral health problems which means that kids are missing out on learning. Dental disease creates a whole cascade of health and economic outcomes that prevent kids from developing into the productive adults that we all want them to be. I know this because I have seen it in my own career. I have seen the difference between kids who are struggling with oral health problems and kids who get their oral health needs met.

Not only does poor dental care impact school academic performance, it has been shown to affect children's mental health as well. Inadequate access to dental care in childhood has also been linked to negative health outcomes for adults, which can be more costly, in that problems which could have been addressed and prevented in childhood instead follow children into adulthood.

Accessing oral health care is not only challenging for adults, but coverage of preventative services is not guaranteed.

LD 1501 requires the Department of Health and Human Services to expand the preventive oral health services provided in schools through the school oral health program to all schools in the state by January 1, 2025.

This expansion of the school oral health program to serve all schools in Maine will also establish an oral health coordinator at the Maine CDC. Additionally, this bill instructs MaineCare to pilot a value-based purchasing initiative for school oral health services to explore the ways in which to invest in these services differently and maximize federal matching dollars. This pilot would also include implementation of prevention and early intervention strategies, disease management and care coordination services for oral health services delivered in schools and early childcare settings. This pilot project must be in place by July 1, 2022, and last no less than 24 months. The department would further be required to submit a report to this committee on the results of the pilot project.

Finally, this bill would require that all Maine children receiving Medicaid have at least one annual preventive dental visit.

Ultimately, LD 1501 ensures that all Maine children have access to comprehensive oral health care – and we know that including this care through our schools will assure that care is delivered on a consistent basis.

I strongly urge you to support LD 1501 and appreciate your consideration for this important legislation. Thank you, and I would be happy to try to answer any questions for you.