



## THE BINGHAM PROGRAM

*A Charitable Endowment at Tufts Medical Center  
Promoting a Healthier Maine*

### **Testimony by the Bingham Program in Support of L.D. 1501 An Act To Protect Oral Health for Children in Maine**

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services  
Monday, April 26, 2019

Good afternoon, Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Morgan Hynd and I am the Director of the Bingham Program, a small charitable endowment held at Tufts Medical Center established in 1932 to promote health and advance medicine in Maine.

I am also a longstanding member of the Maine Oral Health Funders, a group of philanthropies in the state that funds work to improve oral health. For many years, the Maine Oral Health Funders has supported efforts to improve oral health for children in communities around the state. While these efforts, to some degree, expanded access to dental care and strengthened community-based efforts to improve oral health, none has ever come close to fulfilling the need for a comprehensive, statewide oral health and disease prevention program for Maine's children.

The Oral Health Coordinator position that would be created by L.D. 1501 will provide the backbone for such a program. This position did exist at Maine CDC for many years, but was cut and there is no longer a dedicated staff person overseeing the state's oral health and disease prevention efforts. Instead, this work currently falls to the Director of Rural Health and Primary Care, which is an incredibly important and busy position that doesn't have the bandwidth to also run the state's oral health program as effectively as it should be run.

The state needs a dedicated staff person focused on improving oral health for all Maine people. While the rest of this legislation is focused on school-aged children, the Oral Health Coordinator will be charged with oral health promotion and disease prevention more broadly for all ages. With our current fragmented and under-resourced system of oral health care, we need someone at the state level who can effectively and strategically manage programs, identify gaps, and secure federal grants to improve the oral health of all Maine people. Put simply, evidence-based, disease prevention efforts like the school oral health program simply will not improve or grow to meet the needs of all Mainers without dedicated staffing and leadership from our state public health agency.

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Oral health is an essential element of overall health. Oral disease is the most common chronic disease of childhood, and it is one of the leading drivers of emergency room visits among adults. With the long history of systemic barriers that keep the majority of Maine people from accessing regular preventive care, it is time for the state to step up and provide leadership on this issue. This is a winnable battle, and you have many partners who have been working hard to tackle it. But we need leadership on the public side of this public-private partnership to make significant progress.

Therefore, I encourage you to vote in favor of L.D. 1501 to ensure Maine CDC has adequate staffing to run the state's oral health program. As you have heard today, or will hear, this is a modest investment that will pay dividends in better health outcomes, better learning in school, and better economic opportunity for all Mainers.

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