

State of Maine
130th Legislature
Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
Testimony of Beth Pearce, on behalf of Maine Primary Care Association
April 26, 2021
Supporting:

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

Sponsored by Representative Lori Gramlich

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, I am Beth Pearce, and I serve as Oral Health Coordinator at Maine Primary Care Association (MPCA). MPCA is a membership organization that includes all of Maine's 20 Community Health Centers (CHCs).

Maine's Community Health Centers make up the largest primary care network in the state, providing comprehensive, high quality medical, behavioral, and dental care for more than 210,000 people each year or approximately 1 in 6 Mainers. CHCs are at the forefront of delivering care to rural and underserved Maine communities, and serve patients regardless of their health insurance status or ability to pay.

Maine Primary Care Association supports LD 1501 and thanks Representative Gramlich for bringing this extremely important and timely legislation forward.

Oral health care is one of the core services that Community Health Centers are required to offer, either on-site or through coordinated referrals. CHCs, often located in communities of need, serve as critical oral health access points to Maine people. Improving the oral health of children has long been – and will continue to be – one of Maine's CHCs' aspirational care goals.

A number of our health centers participate in the state's School-based Health Center (SBHC) Program, or run their own independent in-school care programs, but there are many schools that CHCs do not currently serve. Making school-based oral health services available in all schools across the state would promote greater access to care by removing barriers for children who need these valuable services, and in return serve to improve their oral and overall health, as well as allow them to focus more time and attention on their education.

As the value and necessity of school-based oral health services are considered, we respectfully ask that the Department and other interested partners collaborate with and leverage the existing oral health work already being done by Community Health Center SBHCs, and others, in the communities they serve. Strengthening, complementing, and expanding the existing network will best utilize Maine's valuable resources to meet the needs of our children.

In closing, as a former Early, Periodic, Screening, Diagnosis and Treatment (EPSDT) Coordinator with the Office of MaineCare services, I am keenly aware of the importance of promoting good

oral health in children and the impact that reduced state funding for public health and loss of staff positions in DHHS has had on overall oral health. To address some of these unmet needs and ensure focus on this key element of oral care, we support re-establishing a full-time oral health coordinator position at the Maine CDC.

On behalf of the patients, staff, and volunteers at Maine's Community Health Centers, we urge passage of LD 1501.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of this bill. If there is any additional information that MPCA or our members could provide, please do not hesitate to contact me at bpearce@mepca.org.

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