

April 26, 2021

Committee on Health and Human Services  
c/o Legislative Information Office  
100 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333

### **Testimony by the University of New England College of Dental Medicine in Support of LD 1501 An Act To Protect Oral Health for Children in Maine**

Good afternoon. I am Jon Ryder, Dean of the University of New England College of Dental Medicine (UNE CDM). Today, I am presenting comments on behalf of the UNE CDM in support of LD 1501, HP1111 An Act To Protect Oral Health for Children in Maine, along with my colleagues Rebecca Carr, Dr. Mohamed ElSalhy, and Dr. Rachel King.

We support LD 1501 as an opportunity to effectively address the most common chronic childhood disease – tooth decay (also known as dental caries). Maine children deserve access to evidence-based services that will prevent the advancement of oral disease that can lead to poor oral health outcomes extending into adulthood. Children suffering from tooth decay can experience difficulties with eating, speaking, and learning ([US Department of Health and Human Services. Oral health in America: a report of the Surgeon General. Rockville, MD: US Department of Health and Human Services, National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, National Institutes of Health, 2000.](#)) National data has shown that approximately 1 in 5 children have untreated tooth decay ([Dye BA, Tan S, Smith V, et al. Trends in oral health status: United States, 1988–1994 and 1999–2004. Vital Health Stat 11 2007;\(248\):1–92](#)) and children with poor oral health status are more likely to miss school and obtain lower grades ([Jackson SL, Vann WF, Kotch JB, Pahel BT, Lee JY. Impact of poor oral health on children's school attendance and performance. Am J Public Health 2011;101:1900–6.](#))

We have had the opportunity to work with existing school-based oral health programs in Cumberland County through partnerships with Greater Portland Health and the Opportunity Alliance. Our students and faculty have seen first-hand how critical these services are to some of Maine's most vulnerable children, how effective school-based delivery can be, and also the challenges these programs continue to face. Reductions in overall public health funding in the state have led to a weakened School Oral Health Program with no new schools being added to the program in many years. Expansion and strengthening of this program is essential to ensuring all Maine children have access to preventive oral health services and the opportunity to overcome the most common chronic childhood disease.

Our College is committed to the success of the Maine CDC School Oral Health Program and are already working to strengthen existing efforts to provide screenings, fluoride varnish, and sealants to school-aged children. Later this year we will be participating in a coordinated statewide effort to provide school-based oral health care to the children of Maine. By establishing dedicated personnel at the state level to oversee the administration of school-based programs, LD 1501 ensures that efforts to provide care are most efficiently directed towards those most in need and that all providers of services are working cohesively and effectively to meet the oral health needs of young Mainers.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony at today's public hearing. On behalf of the UNE College of Dental Medicine community, I am available to answer any questions related to our statement. Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. S. Ryder', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Jon S. Ryder, D.D.S, M.S.  
Dean  
UNE College of Dental Medicine