

Testimony for LD 1501
An Act to Protect Oral Health for Children in Maine
Kailee Williams, DMD
April 26, 2021

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

My name is Kailee Williams, I live in Augusta Maine, and I am here today to testify in favor of LD 1501.

I currently work full time at a Non-Profit, Safety-Net Dental Center in Oakland, Maine. On a daily basis I am met with the challenge of getting children the care that they desperately need. Unfortunately, many families in Maine have significant challenges finding and accessing dental services, and I have found that until there is a reason, like pain, to visit the dentist it is often the case that families are unable to seek out dental care.

Dental disease is the most common chronic childhood disease despite the fact that it is completely preventable. Our dental center, one of the few in the state that is taking children as new patients at this time, we are constantly having to manage a growing list of children who require treatment for abscessed teeth, early tooth loss due to decay, and constant pain that makes eating and sleeping a challenge. Sadly, despite our best efforts, children in pain from this preventable disease still have to wait weeks to months to get the care they need with the current status of the dental public health community.

As the Clinical Director of my office, I feel that we are always fighting an uphill battle. We currently deliver oral health services to over 5,000 community members, 70% of whom are children. But, even working to full capacity, we struggle to get patients the care they need and deserve within a timely manner. While dental disease is preventable, we find ourselves needing to focus on managing the current status of the disease and we aren't able to teach children and their families how to change their habits in the way that is needed to ensure that children do not have the same problems occurring after we manage to control the disease.

About 40% of children insured with MaineCare and 30% of children with commercial insurance did not receive preventive oral health services in the last year. School based care offers a community-centered means of providing consistent preventive oral health services that can reduce the burden of dental illness in Maine's children. Unfortunately, more than 400 of Maine's over 600 schools are currently unable to participate in Maine CDC's School Oral Health Program. Also, Maine's ability to address oral health challenges has been weakened by reduced funding for public health and loss of staff positions in DHHS.

The passage of LD 1501 will extend the School Oral Health Program to deliver core preventive services in our schools, providing a means of meeting the proposed new legislative goal that all children in Maine with Medicaid coverage receive at least one annual preventive dental visit. The bill also provides funding for an Oral Health Coordinator in the Department of Health and Human Services to lead the Maine

Center for Disease Control and Prevention's public health functions related to oral health. It takes a team to provide optimal health care of any sort and, as we have seen most recently with the COVID pandemic, public health services are a critical component of health care teams.

I urge you to approve LD 1501 to provide Maine with the basic resources and tools needed to protect our children's oral health.

Thank you for your time. I am happy to answer any questions you might have now or in the future.

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