



**Partnership** for  
**Children's**  
**Oral Health**

A network to eradicate dental disease in Maine children

**Testimony of Kalie Hess, Associate Director**  
**Partnership for Children's Oral Health on LD 1523, An Act to Establish the Trust for a**  
**Healthy Maine**

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services  
Public Hearing: February 4, 2022

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Committee on Health and Human Services: My name is Kalie Hess and I am the Associate Director of the Partnership for Children's Oral Health (Partnership). The Partnership is a collaborative effort, funded by philanthropic dollars, to build a broad network of individuals and organizations to create a Maine where all children can grow up free from preventable dental disease. This testimony is in support of LD 1523, An Act to Establish the Trust for a Healthy Maine.

The Partnership is invested in ensuring that the State of Maine has sufficient resources and capacity to provide oral health leadership to address the oral health challenges facing the state, including bringing oral health services to children in school settings. Currently, the Maine CDC operates the School Oral Health Program (SOHP) in about 1/3 of Maine schools (maybe fewer at this point, due to the complexities of COVID). The program provides screenings, fluoride varnish, and sometimes sealants to children who need them. These are essential services to help protect oral health for kids, particularly when so many children are unable to access care in a traditional dental office.

For the last eight years or so, a small allocation of funding from the Fund for a Healthy Maine has been the only source of ongoing funding for the state's School Oral Health Program – between \$200,000 and \$300,000 per year typically. These resources are insufficient to address the oral health needs of all Maine children, but this program is an incredibly important foundation of school-based oral health services and it would be devastating to lose the limited funding that exists. Oral health and access to dental care comes up over and over again in community and state needs assessment, but then falls off the priority list just behind other pressing needs. Without the solution identified in this bill, when the Fund for a Health Maine becomes insolvent, it would not be surprising to see oral health – despite being the most common chronic disease among Maine children – fall to the wayside behind other pressing health needs.

We are deeply concerned about the impending cliff and the inevitable decisions that will have to be made about which programs to cut or eliminate entirely from the current allocation structure. A reduction in the Fund for a Healthy Maine allocation would jeopardize Maine's current ability to maintain the School Oral Health Program at all. It could even threaten Maine's ability to apply for federal oral health funding in the future as these FHM dollars are the only state funds that currently can be used as matching funds for federal oral health grant opportunities. But we are also well aware that this same worry extends to every program that counts on the Fund for core essential services that help keep Mainers healthy.

We are impressed that this bill has faced this uncomfortable reality and identified a proactive solution rather than simply waiting until we go over the cliff. Public health solutions take time and prevention efforts need stability and strategic investment in order to produce desired results. Establishing the Trust for a Healthy Maine is the best opportunity we can see to ensure that the tobacco settlement funding can continue to improve the lives of Maine people for years to come.