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Testimony of the Maine Oral Health Coalition
in Support of
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 9, 2022

*MOHC Steering
Committee*

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General Practice
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*Kalie Hess, MPH
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*Beth Pearce
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Kennebec Valley Family
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Maine Dental
Hygienists' Association*

*Judith Feinstein, MSPH
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*The Maine Oral Health
Coalition represents a
statewide group of
organizations and
individuals who work
together as a network
to support each other
in raising awareness
and promoting oral
health and dental
disease prevention
activities, through
community education
and advocacy, with the
vision that oral health
is valued as a vital
element of wellness for
all Maine residents.*

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Judith Feinstein, and I serve as the coordinator of the Maine Oral Health Coalition. Founded over 20 years ago as the Maine Dental Access Coalition, we maintain a close interest in policy and systems changes that can work to improve access to services and oral health status in Maine.

We support LD 1523 in its intent to establish a Trust, which would receive the annual payment Maine receives each year from the tobacco Master Settlement Agreement. The Trust for a Healthy Maine is the best way that this money can have the most impact. Its proposed powers and duties would enable it to remain nimble and responsive to changing needs, while prioritizing public health investments, and it would build on the experience and successes of what we have already accomplished – without the specters of budget cycles and lower payment projections.

You will, or have already heard from others, about the history of the Fund, data on its uses and projections for the future. The Oral Health Coalition has been involved throughout the life of the Fund, with a particular interest in the Maine CDC's Oral Health Program and the Dental Education Loan and Loan Repayment Programs administered by FAME. I have personal experience with both through my former position as the manager of the Maine CDC's Oral Program, overseeing the former and helping to design and implement the latter.

Over the years, we have seen the preventive programs and initiatives supported by the Fund for the most part suffer or be diminished by decreased allocations and the constraints of the two-year budget process. There comes a point when all the corners have been cut, and programs become less effective and less able to meet their intent. Funding shifts have had an adverse impact on the state's school-based oral health program. FAME has made their allocation work, but the need the Dental Loan Programs address is as great as ever, and perhaps more so in 2022 than when the program began.

When the FHM funding began over 20 years ago, and since then, those dollars have been key in efforts to address tobacco use prevention, but also health equity, social determinants of health, and Maine's public health infrastructure – even though those phrases weren't explicitly in our vocabulary. Now they are, and as our understanding of them continues to evolve, we maintain that they and other non-tobacco specific programs are more important than ever. We urge you to support LD 1523.

Thank you for your consideration today, and I would be happy to respond to any questions you might have, now or at the work session.