



Testimony before the Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services: LD 519, *An Act To Expand Adult Dental Health Insurance Coverage*

**Darcy Shargo, CEO, Maine Primary Care Association
February 21, 2019**

Senator Sanborn, Representative Tepler, and distinguished members of the Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services; I am Darcy Shargo, and I serve as CEO of the Maine Primary Care Association (MPCA).

I am testifying today neither for nor against **LD 519, *An Act To Expand Adult Dental Health Insurance Coverage***, on behalf of the Maine Primary Care Association, and its members, which include all of Maine's 19 Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), and one FQHC Look-Alike. Maine's FQHCs, also known as Community Health Centers, provide comprehensive primary and preventive care for approximately 1 in 6 Maine people. Among the core services that Maine's Community Health Centers are required to offer (either on site or through referral arrangement) is oral health care. In fact, Community Health Centers provide millions of dollars in uncompensated dental care as they are required to provide services for Mainers, regardless of ability to pay. From that perspective, our Community Health Centers are in support of any expansion to dental benefit through Medicaid and other insurers. As such, our comments are mostly related to Part A of the bill which contemplates expansion for dental services for adults who receive MaineCare (although we see merit in exploring coverage through private payers as well). The other provisions of the bill (parts B and C) are outside of MPCA's area of expertise, and as such, we defer to others to weigh in on them.

For years, MPCA and its health center members have championed the need for additional dental coverage under MaineCare. In my time with MPCA, I have had many conversations with dentists and other health center staff who have remarked that lack of oral health care is one of the most serious and persistent needs in their communities. One dental practitioner who came from a practice elsewhere in the Northeast shared that he never could have imagined the severity of the oral health needs in Maine when he came here to practice. No doubt in your time as legislators and as citizens of this state, you have seen first-hand the challenges that lack of

access to dental care can create. Access to dental services is not simply a health care issue, it is also an economic one, as we and many others have pointed out over the years. People need confidence when seeking employment, which includes a healthy smile.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit written testimony on this bill. If there is any additional information that MPCA or our members could provide with respect to additional review and/or revisions to this bill, please don't hesitate to contact my office.