



## **Testimony before the Health and Human Services Committee**

### **LD 1399, An Act To Improve Oral Health and Access to Dental Care for Maine Children**

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Senator Gratwick, Representative Hymanson, and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Kalie Hess, and I am the Policy Program Manager for the Maine Primary Care Association (MPCA), whose members include all 20 of the state's Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), which provide high quality, affordable and integrated primary and preventive care services (including extensive oral health care) for over 210,000 individuals, or 1 in every 6 Maine people. I work on oral health issues for our member FQHCs, and I am pleased today to offer testimony on their behalf in strong support of LD 1399.

We are encouraged to see that the state is working to create oral health as a priority program within the Maine Department of Health and Human Services. Having the staff capacity at DHHS to help establish and maintain programs across our state will support the work that FQHCs are already doing in their communities, as improving oral health is and has been a significant concern for FQHCs and their patients. FQHCs are an important part of the system; however, the reality is that it can be hard for parents to bring children to dental appointments due to difficulty with transportation or challenges taking time off work. It is important to provide basic preventive services in schools so all children can receive the care they need without barriers. The creation and supported implementation of a data-driven oral health plan for the state will allow FQHCs and other state partners to more effectively address the systemic problem of oral health disparities. Many FQHC staff have been engaged in collaborative efforts over the years to improve the oral health of their patients, and it will be much easier to coordinate, secure outside funding, and create systemic changes for this pervasive problem with leadership and vision from the Department.

With the roll out of this type of program, we respectfully ask that the Department take time to assess and remain aligned with the existing oral health initiatives that the Federally Qualified Health Centers may be establishing – or have already established – in their local communities. In many cases, for example, health centers have implemented some level of oral health screening and prevention within their local schools and/or communities, and the work that the Department does should complement these efforts. To ensure coordination with all invested partners, we would encourage the development of a stakeholder engagement group to make sure that alignment and support of these programs is ongoing, much like occurs with other programs at the Maine CDC.

Thank you for listening today and please don't hesitate to contact me directly if you have any questions. I can be reached at [khess@mepca.org](mailto:khess@mepca.org) or 207-621-0677.