

State of Maine
130th Legislature
Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services
Testimony of Beth Pearce, on behalf of Maine Primary Care Association
May 13, 2021
Supporting:

LD 1660, “An Act To Modify Dental Licensure Requirements to Consider Credentialed Individuals From Other Jurisdictions”

Sponsored by Representative Denise Tepler

Senator Sanborn, Representative Tepler, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services, I am Beth Pearce, and I serve as Oral Health Coordinator at Maine Primary Care Association (MPCA). MPCA is a membership organization that includes all of Maine's 20 Community Health Centers (CHCs.)

Maine's Community Health Centers make up the largest primary care network in the state, providing comprehensive, high quality medical, behavioral, and dental care for more than 210,000 people each year or approximately 1 in 6 Mainers. CHCs are at the forefront of delivering care to rural and underserved Maine communities, and serve patients regardless of their health insurance status or ability to pay.

Maine Primary Care Association supports LD 1660 and thanks Representative Tepler for bringing this extremely important and timely legislation forward.

For years, Maine has experienced a healthcare staffing shortage. Nowhere is that more critical than in the dental profession. As Maine dental providers retire, attracting young dentists to fill those vacancies is challenging. The average student loan debt for a graduating dentist is approximately \$400,000, therefore many young providers seek more lucrative positions in urban settings.

Further, recent changes to the Health Provider Shortage Area (HPSA)¹ scoring for rural areas means that fewer Maine rural areas are able to recruit graduates for the National Health Services Corp (NHSC) Loan Repayment Program², as they are no longer eligible to qualify, making Maine less attractive to new graduates.

However, Maine has an untapped source of dental providers that could address some of this shortage, those who have been trained and licensed in other jurisdictions. As a former dental practice manager, I interviewed multiple dentists licensed in other countries for dental assistant positions for which they were highly overqualified, yet it was the only dentistry position they could obtain since their licensure and education were not recognized in Maine law.

Beyond dental training and experience, many of these providers bring with them valuable languages, skills, and cultural knowledge that are needed to serve our diverse immigrant population. Not only would the inclusion of these dental providers augment our provider network and improve access, but would help to address issues of inequity and barriers for individuals whose primary language is not English.

A dental practice with staff able to explain a course of care in an individual's native language ensures understanding and better health care outcomes. An informed healthy population is of benefit to the entire state in many ways, one of which is reduced healthcare costs.

¹ [Scoring Shortage Designations | Bureau of Health Workforce \(hrsa.gov\)](https://www.hrsa.gov/scoring-shortage-designations)

² [NHSC Loan Repayment Program \(hrsa.gov\)](https://www.hrsa.gov/nhsc-loan-repayment-program)

On behalf of the patients, staff, and volunteers at Maine's Community Health Centers, we urge passage of LD1660. We believe that with the proper oversight of the Board of Dental Practice, the inclusion of these much needed dental providers will go a long way to meet the needs of Maine's population.

Thank you for considering our comments, and please do not hesitate to contact me directly at bpearce@mepca.org with any follow up questions.

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