

State of Maine | 131st Legislature
Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services
Testimony of Hannah A. Hudson on behalf of Maine Primary Care Association
May 4, 2023

Supporting:
LD 1581, “An Act Regarding Dental Hygienists and Dental Therapists”

Sponsored by Representative Mastraccio

Senator Bailey, Representative Perry, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services, I am Hannah Hudson, Policy and Communications Manager at the Maine Primary Care Association (MPCA).

MPCA is a membership organization that includes all of Maine's 20 Community Health Centers (CHCs), also known as Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs). Maine's CHCs make up the largest independent primary care network in the state, providing high quality and equitable primary and preventive medical, behavioral, and dental health services for over 200,000 people (1 in 6 Mainers) at more than 70 service delivery sites in all 16 Maine counties.

Oral health care access remains a priority for MPCA and the Community Health Center Network. We support LD 1581 and thank Representative Mastraccio and the cosponsors for bringing this bill forward.

Maine is experiencing significant workforce shortages in many health care professions, and dental providers are no exception. Rural areas are experiencing critical challenges with access to care. As more adults have access to MaineCare's expanded dental benefits, the health centers' patient population and the complexity of the patient needs have increased. CHCs are doing everything they can to ensure that patients receive the quality treatment they deserve, but waitlists continue to be long across the state.

Dental therapists are mid-level providers who can perform restorative procedures and some extraction procedures. Their work in a dental practice can alleviate the many demands on general dentists, allowing them to focus on the more complex procedures. This leads to each provider type working to the highest scope of their licensure. This staffing model has become so integral to one Maine CHC's approach to providing dental care that the health center plans to only hire new general dentists who are supportive of working with dental therapists.

Modifying the current supervision of dental therapy from direct supervision to general is an important adjustment that would allow CHCs to continue utilizing these professionals in unique and innovative ways, while also improving access to dental services for the populations being served.

On behalf of Maine's Community Health Centers, thank you for considering our comments. Please do not hesitate to contact me directly at hhudson@mepca.org with any follow up questions.

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