



**Testimony of Carol Carew, CEO
Bucksport Regional Health Center**

**In Support of LD 1301: "An Act to Improve Access to Preventive, Cost-Saving Dental Services"
Friday, April 21, 2017**

Senator Brakey, Representative Hymanson and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Carol Carew and I serve as the CEO of Bucksport Regional Health Center (BRHC). BRHC provides high quality, affordable, primary and preventive services 6,500 patients from 10 towns in our region. I am pleased to be here today to testify in support of LD 1301.

BRHC has provided dental services to our patients for over 16 years. However the lack of reimbursement for parents and other low income adults who have MaineCare coverage creates a significant financial burden. Last year alone, BRHC, provided nearly \$80,000 in uncompensated dental care to our patients. Our philosophy is that we have a responsibility to care for the whole patient, but not receiving reimbursement for the provision of dental services to the adults in our practice is potentially unsustainable.

An important factor that seldom gets mentioned as it relates to oral health care is Maine's opioid and substance use disorder crisis. When adults lack dental coverage for preventive cleanings, fillings and other lower cost procedures, they often forgo these services. This sometimes leads to situations where an individual's oral health deteriorates to a point where the pain becomes so severe they try to get pain medication to alleviate it. We have witnessed the downward spiral that sadly some of our friends, coworkers and family members have experienced who were diagnosed with a genuine medical condition in which they were prescribed pain medication for that they then became dependent on. Passing LD 1301 would help to avoid such risks by ensuring that adults have access to lower cost preventive services that will keep them pain-free and out of the Emergency Department.

At BRHC, we see the devastating effects that a substance use disorder can have on a person's teeth, gums and mouths. At BRHC, we have a program called, "Smiling Inside and Out". It is an integrated program between our behavioral health and dental programs that treats behavioral health and/or patients that suffer with substance use disorders by addressing their dental needs. While they are using, many times the effects of the drugs and the lack of dental care can cause devastating effects. Many patients once they are in treatment they want to address their dental issues to improve their self-esteem and assist in their obtaining a job. Most folks in this situation are building back their lives and do not have the dental insurance or means to pay for these services. This Bill would go a long way in addressing not only their dental needs, but in rebuilding their lives.

The positive outcomes that have been achieved in Maine through investments in primary care have been well-documented. Were we to start taking similar steps with respect to oral health care services we will achieve similar successes and savings. Please vote in support of LD 1301. Thank you for your consideration.