



Testimony before the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Committee

LD 1441, An Act To Align the Laws Governing Dental Therapy with Standards Established by the American Dental Association Commission on Dental Accreditation

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Senator Sanborn, Representative Tepler, and distinguished members of the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial 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 am pleased today to offer testimony on their behalf in support of LD 1441.

Maine Primary Care Association has testified on several bills this legislative session that increase access to dental care for Mainers. The reality of the state of oral health care in Maine is that there is simply more need than there are providers. In order to meet the needs of people who currently don't have access to dental care, we need to be flexible and creative with our solutions. LD 1441, by clarifying and aligning Maine standards for Dental Therapists to be in line with national standards, further solidifies the role of Dental Therapists as mid-level positions to support dental care. Removing restrictions on where Dental Therapists can provide care, and changing the supervision requirements to general supervision versus direct supervision pursuant to an agreement with a dentist, creates the potential for Dental Therapists to be meaningfully employed more broadly across the state.

Maine's FQHCs often struggle to hire dentists, especially in rural areas. In order to meet the growing oral health care needs of Mainers we must be resourceful. Combined with telehealth options and school-level prevention and basic oral health care, having a robust and effective Dental Therapist network in the state inspires optimism in the midst of the oral health challenges we are facing. MPCA encourages consideration of loan repayment for Dental Therapists, as well as Maine-based training programs to help more hygienists meet the Master's degree requirement.

The Maine Primary Care Association sees incredible potential in the use of Dental Therapists to help address provider shortages, and believes LD 1441 is a good step to ensure the profession is well-supported in both legislation and practice.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony and please don't hesitate to contact me directly if you have any questions. I can be reached at khess@mepca.org or 207-621-0677.