



**Written Testimony of Jess Maurer on Behalf of  
The Maine Council on Aging  
To Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services**

**In Favor of LD 1453 -- "An Act To Improve Dental Health for  
Maine Children and Adults with Low Incomes"**

Submitted in Writing on April 17, 2019

Greetings Senator Gratwick, Representative Hymanson, and members of the Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Jess Maurer and I'm the Executive Director for the Maine Council on Aging (MCOA). The MCOA is a broad, multidisciplinary network over 80 organizations, businesses, and older Mainers working together to make sure we all live healthy, engaged, and secure lives with choices and opportunities as we age in our homes and communities. I am providing testimony in favor of LD 1453.

In order for us to live healthy lives, long into older age, we must have access to preventative health care services, including oral health services. Preventative care ensures we don't develop diseases and serious, more costly, health problems that are avoidable. It's well documented that oral health impacts health in many ways. A lack of dental attention can negatively impact Mainers' overall health, communication, and social interaction. There is a correlation between poor oral health and increased rates of diabetes, stroke and heart disease. Poor oral health can also impact mental health, the immune system, and medication efficacy.

Lack of dental insurance is a major access barrier to dental care for older adults – nearly 70% of older Americans currently have no form of dental insurance. Medicare does not currently provide preventative dental coverage. Older people may gain access to dental services through Medicare Advantage Plans or Medigap Plans, but these can be too expensive for low income older Mainers to afford. Currently, MaineCare limits dental care for adults strictly to emergency care necessary to eliminate pain, infection or prevent imminent tooth loss. This system is driving up ER use and posing a considerable financial burden to Maine hospitals.

As MaineCare is the dominant payer of Long Term Supports and Services in Maine, and the expenditures are a significant portion of all MaineCare spending on adults, it only makes good sense that MaineCare benefits should include lower cost preventative services that will reduce the need for higher cost health care, home care and facility-based care services. In short, besides being the right thing to do, helping older people stay healthy through preventative services helps

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reduce the overall cost of care and ensures older people can remain productive and engaged members of their communities long into later life.

It's time we included dental services as part of the MaineCare benefit and recognize the significance of preventative, diagnostic and restorative oral health practices. We urge you to vote in favor of LD 1453.

Thank you.

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