

State Government Committee, Attn: Committee and Local Clerk  
c/o Legislative Information Office  
Cross Building, Room 214  
100 State House Station  
Augusta, ME 04333

Re: LD 996: An Act To Improve Dental Health Access for Maine Children and Adults with Low Incomes

Dear Senator Breen, Representative Fecteau, Representative Brooks, Representative Meyer, Representative Millett, Representative O'Connor, Representative Stover, Representative Supica, Senator Ross, Senator Moore, and other members of the Committee on Health and Human Services

I represent NASW Maine which advocates for the 5000 licensed social workers in Maine in support of LD 996." Maine is one of the 10 of 52 U.S. states that limits it's adult dental reimbursement in it's Medicaid program to emergencies-only. This means Mainers suffer avoidable pain, experience health problems and complications, and have preventable tooth loss because of not accessing this essential healthcare. A lack of access to dental care results in Mainers seeking care in expensive emergency department visits and contributing to a steady increase in common and costly long-term health problems like heart disease, infection, and diabetes. The following are essential points to consider:

- In 2009 MaineCare spent \$6,590,888 on avoidable emergency department visits and other outpatient services for dental pain that did not definitively treat the dental disease. (1)
- 4,949 visits for members age 25 – 44 for dental disease made it the number one reason for an emergency department visit. (1)
- 44.6% of Mainers 65 years and older with an annual income of less than \$15,000 have lost all their permanent teeth, compared to 26.5% among those with an income between \$15,000 and \$25,000, 22.5% among those with an income between \$25,000 and \$35,000, and 4.1% among those with an income of \$50,000 or more (2)

Adding dental benefit to our health system means that individuals and families, including Mainers 65 and older, and people with disabilities, and young adults, could get the care they urgently need. Dental care is a fundamental human right and is inseparable from a person's general health.

I urge you all to vote "Yes" on LD 996.

Respectfully submitted,  
Kerstin Kirchner, MPH, MHRT/C  
Member of the NASW, Chapter Maine, Policy Committee  
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References:

Reference #1: [https://lldc.mainelegislature.org/Open/Rpts/rk52\\_3\\_m2m3\\_2011.pdf](https://lldc.mainelegislature.org/Open/Rpts/rk52_3_m2m3_2011.pdf)

Reference #2: <http://www.maineoralhealthcoalition.org/docs/Oral%20Health%20Maine%202-2-2012.pdf>

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