

MAINE STATE LEGISLATURE

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132nd MAINE LEGISLATURE

FIRST SPECIAL SESSION-2025

Legislative Document

No. 1891

H.P. 1262

House of Representatives, May 5, 2025

**An Act to Address the Dental Professional Workforce Shortage by
Establishing Scholarship and Loan Programs and Updating the
Dental Care Access Tax Credit**

Received by the Clerk of the House on May 1, 2025. Referred to the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs pursuant to Joint Rule 308.2 and ordered printed pursuant to Joint Rule 401.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "R B. Hunt".

ROBERT B. HUNT
Clerk

Presented by Representative DAIGLE of Fort Kent.
Cosponsored by Senator STEWART of Aroostook and
Representatives: DEBRITO of Waterville, GRAHAM of North Yarmouth, GRIFFIN of
Levant, LEMELIN of Chelsea, Senator: MOORE of Washington.

1 **Be it enacted by the People of the State of Maine as follows:**

2 **Sec. 1. 20-A MRSA §12301, sub-§2-A** is enacted to read:

3 **2-A. Extreme shortage area.** "Extreme shortage area" means the county of
4 Androscoggin, Aroostook, Franklin, Hancock, Kennebec, Knox, Lincoln, Oxford,
5 Penobscot, Piscataquis, Somerset, Waldo or Washington.

6 **Sec. 2. 20-A MRSA §12307** is enacted to read:

7 **§12307. Dentists for Maine's Future Scholarship Program**

8 There is established the Dentists for Maine's Future Scholarship Program, referred to
9 in this section as "the scholarship program," to provide a tuition subsidy of 50% of the cost
10 of attendance, up to a maximum of \$25,000 per student annually, for eligible students who
11 enter dental school programs in this State for the purpose of increasing the number of
12 dentists in this State who practice in extreme shortage areas. For the purposes of this
13 section, "cost of attendance" means the tuition and fees applicable to an eligible student,
14 together with estimated other expenses reasonably related to the cost of attendance at a
15 dental school program in this State.

16 **1. Definition; eligible student.** For purposes of this section, "eligible student" means
17 a student who meets eligibility requirements set by the authority by rule that include at least
18 the following:

19 A. That the student is or will be enrolled in a dental school program in this State; and

20 B. That the student has a substantial connection to the State as evidenced by factors
21 such as prior education in this State, a parent residing in this State and at least one year
22 of residence in this State for purposes other than education.

23 **2. Priority.** In awarding scholarships under the scholarship program, the authority
24 shall give priority to an eligible student who meets at least 2 of the following provisions:

25 A. The student has received a high school diploma, or its equivalent, in this State;

26 B. The student has received a bachelor's degree from a 4-year college or university in
27 this State; and

28 C. A parent of the student maintains the parent's legal residence in this State.

29 **3. Allocation.** The total number of scholarships available under the scholarship
30 program must be allocated equally among dental school programs in this State, except that
31 a program may not be allocated more than the number of scholarships for which the
32 program has raised matching funds pursuant to subsection 4 as of the January 1st
33 immediately preceding the scholarship award.

34 **4. Matching funds.** Beginning January 1, 2026, if a dental school program in this
35 State raises matching funds in an amount less than the amount of scholarship funds
36 allocable to it under this section from the State for a given year or does not have a sufficient
37 number of eligible students who apply to fill the number of scholarships allocable to it, the
38 number of scholarships allocated to that program must be reduced accordingly and
39 scholarships must be reallocated for that year to eligible students of other dental school
40 programs in this State. A dental school program in this State must use funds raised through
41 philanthropic and private dental education fundraising to increase the number of

1 scholarships available to eligible students and must use matching funds to provide no fewer
2 than the number of scholarships allocated to the program by the State in a given academic
3 year.

4 **5. Notification.** For each eligible student receiving a scholarship under this section,
5 the student's dental school program in this State shall notify the authority of the location of
6 the student's residency and place of employment for each of the 8 years after the student's
7 graduation from the program.

8 **6. Dentists for Maine's Future Scholarship Fund created.** A nonlapsing, interest-
9 earning, revolving fund under the jurisdiction of the authority, known as the Dentists for
10 Maine's Future Scholarship Fund, is created to carry out the purposes of this section. Any
11 unexpended balance in the fund carries over for continued use under this section. The
12 authority may receive, invest and expend on behalf of the fund money from gifts, grants,
13 bequests and donations or other sources in addition to money appropriated or allocated by
14 the State. Money in the fund must be invested by the authority, as provided by law, with
15 the earned income to be added to the fund. Money received by the authority on behalf of
16 the fund, except interest income, must be used for the purposes of this section; interest
17 income may be used for such purposes or to pay student financial assistance administrative
18 costs incurred by the authority.

19 **Sec. 3. 20-A MRSA §12308** is enacted to read:

20 **§12308. Extreme Shortage Area Dental Education Loan Program**

21 **1. Establishment.** The Extreme Shortage Area Dental Education Loan Program,
22 referred to in this section as "the program," is established. The authority shall administer
23 the program. Under the program and pursuant to subsection 3:

24 A. Loans are available to Maine residents enrolled in a dental school program or
25 enrolled in any accredited school in a program of study for dental hygienists, dental
26 therapists, expanded function dental assistants or dental assistants; or

27 B. A loan repayment agreement is available to a person who is eligible for licensure
28 as a doctor of dental medicine or as a dental hygienist, dental therapist, expanded
29 function dental assistant or dental assistant in this State and who has outstanding dental
30 education loans.

31 **2. Application process.** An application for participation in the program must be made
32 directly to the authority.

33 **3. Eligibility.** The following persons are eligible to participate in the program:

34 A. Applicants under subsection 1, paragraph A who meet eligibility criteria established
35 by rule of the authority, which at a minimum must require:

36 (1) That a student be a Maine resident;

37 (2) That a student be enrolled in a dental school program or in any accredited
38 school with a program of study for dental hygienists, dental therapists, expanded
39 function dental assistants or dental assistants;

40 (3) That a student agree to serve an extreme shortage area; and

41 (4) That priority be given to a student:

42 (a) Who previously received a loan pursuant to this section; and

1 (b) Who exhibits financial need; and

2 B. Applicants under subsection 1, paragraph B who meet eligibility criteria established
3 by rule of the authority, which at a minimum must require:

4 (1) That an applicant be eligible for licensure to practice dental medicine or as a
5 dental hygienist, dental therapist, expanded function dental assistant or dental
6 assistant in this State;

7 (2) That an applicant have outstanding dental education loans; and

8 (3) That an applicant agree to serve an extreme shortage area.

9 **4. Maximum amount.** For a loan recipient pursuant to subsection 1, paragraph A
10 who receives a first loan after January 1, 2026 or a loan repayment recipient pursuant to
11 subsection 1, paragraph B who signs a first loan repayment agreement after January 1,
12 2026, the maximum loan or loan repayment amount available is \$25,000 per year for a
13 period of up to 4 years.

14 **5. Loan agreement; forgiveness.** A student applying under subsection 1, paragraph
15 A shall enter into a loan agreement as set out in this subsection.

16 A. Upon completion of the recipient's dental education, the recipient shall repay the
17 loan in accordance with this paragraph.

18 (1) A loan recipient who does not obtain loan forgiveness pursuant to
19 subparagraph (2) shall repay the entire principal of the loan plus simple interest at
20 a rate to be determined by rule of the authority.

21 Interest does not begin to accrue until the loan recipient completes the recipient's
22 dental education.

23 (2) A loan recipient who, upon completion of the recipient's dental education,
24 including any fellowships, elects to serve as a doctor of dental medicine, dental
25 hygienist, dental therapist, expanded function dental assistant or dental assistant in
26 an extreme shortage area is forgiven 25% of the original outstanding indebtedness
27 for each year of that practice.

28 B. Loans must be repaid over a term of no longer than 10 years, except that the chief
29 executive officer may extend a loan recipient's term as necessary to ensure repayment
30 of the loan. Repayment must commence when the loan recipient completes, withdraws
31 from or otherwise fails to continue the recipient's dental education.

32 C. A loan recipient serving an extreme shortage area pursuant to paragraph A,
33 subparagraph (2) must serve patients regardless of the patients' ability to pay through
34 insurance or other payment source.

35 **6. Loan repayment agreement.** An applicant under subsection 1, paragraph B shall
36 enter into a loan repayment agreement as set out in this subsection.

37 A. A loan repayment recipient who signs a first loan repayment agreement after
38 January 1, 2026 receives payment from the authority on the recipient's outstanding
39 indebtedness for dental education at a rate of up to \$25,000 per year of practice in an
40 extreme shortage area for up to 4 years as long as the recipient continues to serve as a
41 doctor of dental medicine, dental hygienist, dental therapist, expanded function dental
42 assistant or dental assistant in an extreme shortage area.

1 B. A person receiving loan repayment payments under this subsection must serve
2 patients regardless of the patients' ability to pay through insurance or other payment
3 source.

4 **7. Default.** A loan recipient pursuant to subsection 1, paragraph A who agrees to
5 practice in an extreme shortage area and who fails to complete the period of service
6 required to pay off the loan is liable to the authority for an amount equal to the sum of the
7 total amount paid by or on behalf of the authority to or on behalf of the recipient under the
8 agreement under subsection 5 plus interest at a rate determined by the authority. Credit for
9 practice in an extreme shortage area must be awarded for each consecutive 12-month period
10 served. Exceptions may be made by the authority in accordance with subsection 8.

11 A loan recipient may be granted permission to default without penalty from an agreement
12 to serve in an extreme shortage area under subsection 5 by petitioning the authority.
13 Grounds for permission to default without penalty include, but are not limited to,
14 catastrophic circumstances that prevent the recipient from remaining in an extreme
15 shortage area for the required period of time. The recipient receives credit for the number
16 of months served, and the remaining financial obligation plus interest must be repaid to the
17 authority in cash under the terms of the original agreement.

18 **8. Deferments.** Deferments on the repayment of a loan under the program pursuant
19 to subsection 1, paragraph A may be granted for causes established by rule of the authority.
20 Interest at a rate to be determined by rule of the authority must be assessed during the
21 deferment. A loan recipient's total debt to the authority, including principal and interest,
22 must be repaid either through return service or cash payments. The chief executive officer
23 shall make determinations of deferment on a case-by-case basis. The decision of the chief
24 executive officer is final.

25 **Sec. 4. 36 MRSA §5219-DD**, as amended by PL 2017, c. 435, §§1 to 3, is further
26 amended to read:

27 **§5219-DD. Dental care access credit**

28 **1. Definitions.** As used in this section, unless the context otherwise indicates, the
29 following terms have the following meanings.

30 A. "Eligible dentist" means a person licensed as a dentist under Title 32, chapter 143
31 who, after January 1, 2009:

32 (1) First begins practicing dentistry in the State by joining an existing dental
33 practice in an ~~underserved~~ extreme shortage area or establishing a new dental
34 practice or purchasing an existing dental practice in an ~~underserved~~ extreme
35 shortage area;

36 (2) Agrees to practice full time for at least 5 years in an ~~underserved~~ extreme
37 shortage area; and

38 (3) Is certified under subsection 3 to be eligible by the oral health program.

39 A-1. "Eligible dental hygienist" means a person licensed as a dental hygienist under
40 Title 32, chapter 143 who, after January 1, 2009:

41 (1) First begins practicing dental hygiene in the State by joining an existing dental
42 practice in an extreme shortage area or establishing a new dental practice or
43 purchasing an existing dental practice in an extreme shortage area;

(2) Agrees to practice full time for at least 5 years in an extreme shortage area; and

(3) Is certified under subsection 3 to be eligible by the oral health program.

A-2. "Extreme shortage area" means the county of Androscoggin, Aroostook, Franklin, Hancock, Kennebec, Knox, Lincoln, Oxford, Penobscot, Piscataquis, Somerset, Waldo or Washington.

B. "Oral health program" means the program within the Department of Health and Human Services with responsibility for oral health promotion and dental disease prevention activities.

~~C. "Underserved area" means an area in the State that is a dental health professional shortage area as defined by the federal Department of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration.~~

2. Credit. An eligible dentist determined to be eligible before January 1, 2012 is allowed a credit for each taxable year, not to exceed \$15,000, against the taxes due under this Part. An eligible dentist determined to be eligible on or after January 1, 2012 but before January 1, 2018 is allowed a credit for each taxable year, not to exceed \$12,000, against the taxes due under this Part. An eligible dentist or eligible dental hygienist determined to be eligible on or after January 1, 2018 but before January 1, ~~2023~~ 2032 is allowed a credit, not to exceed \$6,000 in the first year, \$9,000 in the 2nd year, \$12,000 in the 3rd year, \$15,000 in the 4th year and \$18,000 in the 5th year, against the taxes due under this Part. The credit may be claimed in the first year that the eligible dentist or eligible dental hygienist meets the conditions of eligibility for at least 6 months and each of the 4 subsequent years. The credit is not refundable.

3. Eligibility limitation; certification. The oral health program shall certify up to 5 eligible dentists in each year in 2009, 2010 and 2011, up to 6 additional eligible dentists in each year from 2012 through 2015 and up to 5 eligible dentists in each year from 2018 through 2022. ~~Additional dentists may not be certified after 2022. Beginning in 2025, the oral health program shall certify up to 10 eligible dentists and up to 10 eligible dental hygienists each year.~~ The oral health program shall monitor certified dentists and certified dental hygienists to ensure that they continue to be eligible for the credit under this section and shall decertify any dentist or dental hygienist who ceases to meet the conditions of eligibility. The oral health program shall notify the bureau whenever a dentist or dental hygienist is certified or decertified. A decertified dentist or decertified dental hygienist ceases to be eligible for the credit under this section beginning with the tax year during which the dentist or dental hygienist is decertified.

~~**4. Review.** By March 1, 2011, the oral health program shall submit to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over taxation matters a report that analyzes the effectiveness of the credit provided by this section in attracting dentists to underserved areas and recommending whether the credit should be retained, repealed or amended. The committee may submit legislation to the First Regular Session of the 125th Legislature related to the report.~~

5. Rules. The Department of Health and Human Services may adopt rules to implement this section. Rules adopted pursuant to this section are routine technical rules as defined in Title 5, chapter 375, subchapter 2-A.

6. Repeal. This section is repealed December 31, ~~2027~~ 2032.

SUMMARY

This bill establishes the Dentists for Maine's Future Scholarship Program to provide a tuition subsidy of 50% of the cost of attendance, up to a maximum of \$25,000 per student annually, for eligible students who enter dental school programs in this State for the purpose of increasing the number of dentists in this State who practice in extreme shortage areas of the State. The bill also establishes the Extreme Shortage Area Dental Education Loan Program to provide loans and loan repayment agreements to eligible dental students and individuals who are eligible for licensure as a doctor of dental medicine or as a dental hygienist, dental therapist, expanded function dental assistant or dental assistant who agrees to serve an extreme shortage area in the State. The bill also updates the dental care access tax credit to include eligible dental hygienists and changes the date that the tax credit is repealed to December 31, 2032.