



**Testimony in Support of
LD 206, Supplemental Budget Section C-5
Extension of the Small Business Health Insurance Premium Relief Program**

Kevin Lewis, CEO

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As Maine's only nonprofit CO-OP health insurance company, Community Health Options is pleased to present this testimony in support of the Governor's Supplemental Budget, specifically the extension of the Small Business Health Insurance Premium Relief Program through the end of 2023.

With more than 1,200 small businesses among our membership, and having started as a small business ourselves, we know of the challenges of running a small business. Aside from our four percent average decrease in small group premiums in 2023, the cost of coverage has taken an increasing slice of the budgets of small businesses over the past decade. Now with some market indicators pointing to a slowdown in the economy, this ongoing relief, which is applied wholly and directly to reduce the costs borne by employers and employees, is an efficient and effective economic shot in the arm.

In today's tight labor market, many employers have had difficulty recruiting and retaining staff. One avenue for small businesses to attract and keep talent is through competitive benefits packages. Some small businesses are utilizing the savings through the health insurance premium relief program to provide additional forms of coverage and voluntary benefits. Extending the Small Business Health Insurance Premium Relief Program provides a much-needed economic boost at a time of great uncertainty.

We urge the Committee to support section C-5 of the Supplemental Budget, LD 206. Thank you for the opportunity to present our support of the program.