



**Testimony of Maine Public Health Association Neither For Nor Against:  
LD 510: An Act to Protect the Public Health by Allowing the Appointment of Associate Health Officers**

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services  
Room 209, Cross State Office Building  
Wednesday, March 22, 2023

Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Rebecca Boulos. I am a resident of South Portland and executive director of Maine Public Health Association.

MPHA is the state's oldest, largest, and most diverse association for public health professionals. We represent more than 700 individual members and 60 organizations across the state. The mission of MPHA is to improve and sustain the health and well-being of all people in Maine through health promotion, disease prevention, and the advancement of health equity. As a statewide nonprofit association, we advocate, act, and advise on critical public health challenges, aiming to improve the policies, systems, and environments that underlie health inequities – but which also have potential to improve health outcomes for all people in Maine. We are not tied to a national agenda, which means we are responsive to the needs of Maine's communities, and we take that responsibility seriously.

MPHA is neither for nor against LD 510: "An Act to Protect the Public Health by Allowing the Appointment of Associate Health Officers." This bill would establish a new municipal health officer position ("Associate Health Officer") who would report to the Local Health Officer (LHO) and assist with their duties.

MPHA has been a longstanding partner in strengthening Maine's public health infrastructure, working with Maine CDC and other stakeholders on these efforts. We co-convened the State Public Health System Assessment in 2020/2021 and [published a website](#) about Maine's governmental public health system. [LD 1523](#) and [LD 1693](#), introduced in the 130<sup>th</sup> Legislature, would have provided funding for the State Health Plan, in addition to supporting cross-sector, public-private partnerships, health planning, and workforce development training (among other public health activities) – all in service to supporting local community public health.

Most LHOs in Maine work very part-time (4-8 hours/week) and are paid a small stipend for their work. They typically respond to nuisance issues (e.g., rats), as well as issues related to hoarding and landlord-tenant issues. In many areas around the state, they serve as unintentional first responders, as many of these issues are connected to challenges related to mental illness, substance use disorder, and homelessness. As the state is rebuilding its public health nursing workforce, bolstering community health workers, and staffing public health units statewide, some LHOs may find themselves without needed support resources. Certainly, there are community action agencies, nonprofit organizations, health clinics, and many other public health and health care supports, but with wide geographic service areas and high demands, it can take a long time for needed support to be obtained. We appreciate, then, the impetus for this bill – additional staff capacity at the local level to help with public health efforts. We are unclear about the authority the Associate LHO would have to respond to public health challenges, or the available workforce (or funding) to fill the positions. However, we do also understand that this position could help with succession planning and, in communities that are able to staff an Associate LHO, additional capacity to meet local needs. Thank you for your consideration of our testimony.