

13 April 2023

Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and distinguished members of the Committee on Health and Human Services,

Thank you for allowing me to testify before you. I speak as a citizen of Maine, a recently retired family physician for the past 41 years and director of a large regional substance use treatment program for the past ten years, and a current member of the Knox and Waldo County Board of Visitors for the past three years.

One of the biggest problems I have witnessed in our local county jails is the lack of funding for health care, a problem which was here when I came to Maine in 1982 and has been growing steadily ever since. It seems nonsensical to me and harmful to both the incarcerated person and the wider community to suspend MaineCare for those who are incarcerated. As an example, our local jail had one of the highest rates of hepatitis C in the nation a number of years ago when I was helping to determine local hepatitis rates. This was not good for prisoners who could not afford then \$1000 per pill price tag for the current treatment, nor for the wider community who were exposed to the disease on the person's release from jail.

Similarly, injectable depot buprenorphine to treat substance use disorder can greatly lower the cost and work burden on our local jail personnel, but the cost of the drug is currently out of reach of local jails. If substance-using jail inmates had MaineCare continued, they would have access to this drug which is literally life-saving in terms of suicide (the commonest cause of in-jail deaths) and overdose (the commonest cause of post-release deaths), but county jails cannot afford the prohibitively high price tag for this drug (over \$1,800 per injection).

It is clear that enabling the continuation of MaineCare coverage for those in our county jails is a win-win situation, saving counties millions of dollars while lessening health risks to the wider community and saving lives of many of our least fortunate citizens.

Sincerely,

Tim Hughes, MD
Belfast, ME

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