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## **Testimony in Support of LD 1161: An Act to Fund Free Health Clinics**

April 14, 2023

Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

I am Anita Ruff, Executive Director of the Oasis Free Clinics in Brunswick, which is also where I live, I am here today to urge you to support LD 1161. The mission of the Oasis Free Clinics (Oasis) is to strengthen our community by providing no-cost medical, dental and prescription assistance services to our uninsured neighbors in need.

Oasis serves adults who live in Freeport, Durham, Brunswick, Harpswell and Sagadahoc County who are at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level, which is the equivalent of almost \$30,000 a year if someone is single. Currently, we provide our free services to almost 500 of our neighbors. The majority of our patients work, many of them multiple jobs, and they either were not offered or cannot afford health insurance.

There are over 1,400 free and charitable clinics in the United States. Yet there are only a handful in Maine, catching those who fall through the cracks in our healthcare system. Oasis and my free clinic colleagues are a critical part of Maine's safety net, quietly serving our communities with the dedication and support of volunteers, donors, and community partners.

Oasis was created almost 30 years ago because there was a gap in the healthcare system, and unfortunately, it has only gotten more difficult for many people, especially those who experience poverty, struggle with mental health and substance use issues, have limited literacy skills, and who bring complex lives into the exam room. This is why Oasis and the other free clinics in Maine are important.

I doubt that any of you question the important role the free clinics play in the lives of our patients or the health of our communities. I imagine, however, that many of you are wondering why the State of Maine should provide funding to support our work.

Oasis has never received state funding and will receive our first federal funding this fall to help expand our clinic to meet the growing demand for our services. For almost 30 years, our funding has come from a variety of sectors, such as individuals, religious organizations, businesses, the United Way, and private foundations. Today, I am asking government to join our other partners.

Please vote yes to support LD 1161. Maine's free clinics need your help so we can do more for the people in our communities.

Thank you.