

Testimony, April 14, 2023, 10 am
Committee on Health and Human Services
LD 1161: An Act to Fund Free Health Clinics

To: Representative Brennan, Senator Ingwersen and Members of the Committee:

The Friends of the Portland Community Free Clinic write in support of LD 1161. The mission of the Portland Community Free Clinic is to provide essential healthcare at no cost to those in the community without health insurance coverage. The populations served typically earn too much to qualify for MaineCare, are not offered employee-sponsored health insurance, and are unable to afford individual health insurance, with incomes at or below 250% of the federal poverty level. This population has also grown in the past few years due to the impact of the pandemic with job and insurance losses. Additionally, the upcoming lapse of the pandemic-era Medicaid eligibility will result in loss of Medicaid coverage, increasing the demand for services. Maine Department of Health and Human Services estimates nearly 9,000 of those impacted will not qualify for government-funded programs and will need to secure health insurance coverage which may not be affordable. Free clinics are an option to provide essential healthcare and stable medical homes for these people.

The Portland Community Free Clinic (PCFC) is an example of a successful free clinic that has served as a vital component of the healthcare safety net in Southern Maine for 30 years, providing primary healthcare, mental health services and health education, referrals to specialty care and diagnostic testing as well as ongoing coordination of care to over 600 patients annually. During the pandemic, the PCFC was also able to utilize telemedicine and continue to safely provide essential services. Historically most care has been offered in the evenings, which allows access to medical care after the traditional workday. The clinic hours and the addition of telemedicine have benefited the hard-working patients of the PCFC. The clinic operates on a modest budget of approximately \$12,000-\$14,000 per month. Over 100 dedicated volunteer physicians, nurses, nurse practitioners, social workers, counselors, and administrative staff share their time and expertise, allowing the PCFC to provide high-quality care at such a very low cost. We estimate that for every \$1 in our budget, more than \$15 in healthcare is provided to our patients.

The Friends of the PCFC was established in 2013 in response to a funding crisis that threatened the closure of the PCFC. The board is comprised of volunteers who raise money to financially support the operations of the clinic to meet the community need. The Friends are dedicated to ensuring that high quality healthcare is provided by the staff and volunteers of the PCFC. Increased, more reliable funding from the state would not only allow the PCFC to expand its work serving vulnerable populations but also strengthen the healthcare safety net in the state.

Thank you for your consideration and support of LD 1161.

Peter Toohey
President
Friends of the Portland Community Free Clinic