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Testimony for LD 263: "An Act to Ensure Access to Health Care"

Senator Bailey, Representative Perry, and distinguished members of the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Committee, my name is Dr. Deborah Hagler. I am a resident of Brunswick, a pediatrician, the mother of two young adults, and concerned citizen.

Only half of girls who become pregnant in adolescence will receive a high school diploma (versus 90% of those who do not become pregnant). Children of adolescent mothers struggle as well. They are more likely to drop out of high school and struggle with health problems and unemployment as they age.¹ While rates of sexual activity have not changed among adolescents, the teen birth rate has been steadily dropping and contraception has played a significant role.² It cannot be overstated that **access to essential reproductive services is critical for adolescents**. Young people are impulsive and make careless decisions, often with no foresight into what consequences might result.

LD 263 is very important for the care of adolescents in Maine. Most Catholic controlled health care facilities follow the Doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church. This prohibits these institutions from offering contraception/ abortion/ condom distribution and the full spectrum of HIV care services, for example. It is a real possibility that a religiously controlled provider could become the only option for care in some of our rural communities. Teens would have no idea about other options for their reproductive care which could have profound impacts on the future of the young women and the ensuing generation of that community.

LD 263 prevents the loss of access to reproductive services if these situations occur and requires that they remain available when systems merge.

The Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics strongly encourages passage of this bill for the health and well-being of our adolescent population.