



Consumers for Affordable Health Care

*Advocating the right to quality, affordable
health care for all Mainers.*

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To the Joint Standing Committee On Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services

Testimony in Support of:

LD 263, An Act to Ensure Access to Health Care

May 1, 2023

Senator Bailey, Representative Perry, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee On Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services, thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments in support of LD 263, An Act to Ensure Access to Health Care.

My name is Kate Ende and I am a policy director at Consumers for Affordable Health Care, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that advocates the right to quality, affordable health care for every person in Maine. As designated by Maine's Attorney General, CAHC serves as Maine's Health Insurance Consumer Assistance Program (CAP), which operates a toll-free HelpLine. Our HelpLine, fields approximately 6,000 calls and emails every year from people across Maine who need help obtaining, keeping, using, or fixing problems with private health insurance or with accessing or affording health care services. CAHC also serves as the Ombudsman program for Maine's Medicaid program, MaineCare, and helps people apply for and navigate the enrollment process for MaineCare. It is with that background that we provide these comments.

This committee has had several discussions related to the potential impact of mergers on health care costs and market dynamics, which are extremely important to consider when evaluating the appropriateness of a merger or acquisition of a health care facility or provider. However, it is critical to also consider potential changes to the availability of or access to health care services.

Maine is considered the most rural state in the country, with forty percent of the state's population living in one of Maine's 11 rural counties.¹ Living in rural areas is often associated with increased barriers to accessing care – due to lack of transportation, a need to travel farther distances to providers, or a lack of availability of certain types of providers. Many Mainers live in care deserts without adequate access to comprehensive health care services, and already must travel long distances or endure long waiting periods to receive care. We would have serious concerns about any changes to Maine's health care landscape that would further limit Mainer's access to care or reduce availability of health care services.

Nationally, there is a growing trend of Catholic health systems merging with or acquiring non-religious health care facilities. This trend has generated concerns, as mergers with or

¹ <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/public-health-systems/rhpc/rural-health.shtml>

acquisitions of non-religious health care facilities by religious health systems, in many instances, have resulted in more limited or reduced access to comprehensive health care services, including reproductive health care.²

Not all Mainers live in an area where they can choose between multiple providers or health care facilities from which they would prefer to receive services from that are reasonably accessible. In some situations, if a provider or facility were to limit or stop offering certain health care services following a merger or acquisition, communities could lose access to those services altogether.

By preventing mergers and acquisitions that would otherwise limit or reduce the availability of reproductive health care services, this bill will help preserve access to comprehensive health care, protect patient autonomy, encourage competition, and will help to ensure Maine people can continue to get the care they need in their communities. For these reasons, we urge you to support this bill.

Thank you.

² Uttley, L., & Khaikin, C. (2016). Growth of Catholic Hospitals and Health Systems: 2016 Update of the Miscarriage of Medicine Report. MergerWatch. Retrieved from http://static1.1.sqspcdn.com/static/f/816571/27061007/1465224862580/MW_Update-2016-MiscarrOfMedicine-report.pdf?token=7oInPjv7cxsyIkjf1HRnSTBytfQ%3D