

MaineHealth

Testimony of Dr. David Chalmers, MaineHealth In Strong Support of LD 1858, “An Act to Ensure Access to Newly Born Male Infant Circumcision by Requiring MaineCare Coverage” Monday, May 8, 2023

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Dave Chalmers, I’m a physician at Maine Medical Center, and I am here to testify in strong support of LD 1858 on behalf of MaineHealth. I’m fellowship trained in pediatric urology and have been in practice for about 10 years now. I really appreciate the opportunity to be here today and I’m sorry I can’t be there in person as I have a busy day of seeing patients.

Today, I’m advocating on behalf of the patients and families of Maine; to support their access to the newborn circumcision procedure. To be clear and upfront, I am not advocating that all newborn males get circumcised. What I will argue is that circumcision remains a very personal choice, occasionally culturally charged, that includes a legitimate medical rationale, and for that reason, should be covered by MaineCare.

The medical benefits of circumcision include a reduction in childhood urinary tract infections, a reduction in transmission of some sexually transmitting infections such as HIV, the elimination of the risk of penile cancer, and avoiding a variety of different inflammatory and irritative conditions such as pathologic phimosis and paraphimosis. I don’t want to overstate these benefits. An important point I would like to instill today is that families with the culture and intent of circumcising their newborn boy- those are the children who will benefit most from the procedure, who will more likely avoid those negative consequences, and who we should support in circumcision access. Care of the uncircumcised vs circumcised penis does have the potential to be a little nuanced and every urologist in the world can cite a million examples of how a newborn circumcision COULD have benefited patients. A few of those examples...

1. The child with a congenital anomaly of the urinary tract, who turns out to be at a significantly higher risk for UTIs and kidney damage. This is amongst the strongest medical indication for circumcision.
2. The elderly patient who, for any number of reasons, has been unable to care for himself optimally and develops penile cancer- a horribly disfiguring disease.
3. A specific recent example also very common in the world of pediatric urology: I recently treated a teenage boy. He did not get circumcised at birth despite the family wishes. At the time, they weren’t able to afford the cost to pay for it out of pocket (average cost is approximately \$450 and not insignificant). He developed a series of low grade, smoldering infections, and required a circumcision around puberty- an extremely sensitive timeframe and costing MaineCare almost nine thousand dollars in total charges. There was such an intense inflammatory reaction ongoing, that he required another outpatient surgery to address a urethral stricture, again costing MaineCare almost eight

thousand dollars. It would have saved the MaineCare program almost \$16,500 if the circumcision had been covered as a newborn.

It is remarkably difficult to capture the cost effectiveness of the newborn circumcision for a large population and over a lifetime, but there are so many situations like this where a newborn circumcision would have saved so much and would have avoided so much heartache and waste. There is medical literature to support the cost effectiveness of newborn circumcision over a lifetime.

Lastly, I don't want to sound hyperbolic about this topic. In my job, I am certainly not advocating for all boys to be circumcised, but for those choosing this procedure for their newborn son, we should recognize the medical benefits and the potential savings to the MaineCare program. There's so much complexity in medicine, but on this point we can keep it simple: Let people choose and not let the cost be a barrier. Whether it's for religious reasons, as in the Jewish faith, for cultural reasons like the typical Maine family or the refugee New Mainer- we should support that choice with MaineCare coverage- for their health, for the economics, because it's the right thing to do!

Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.