

TESTIMONY ON LD 1955
An Act to Require Hospitals and Hospital-affiliated Providers to Provide Financial Assistance for Medical Care

Committee on Health and Human Services

January 17, 2024

SUPPORT

Submitted by: Shannon L. Carr, MD, MSc, CFP, FACOG

My name is Shannon Carr. I'm a board-certified obstetrician-gynecologist and I live in Bristol, Maine. As a physician who has practiced in Maine for 20 years, I care deeply about my patients and the families I serve, and feel a duty to not only provide medical care to the best of my abilities, but to also speak up in support of policies that can protect and improve their health and wellbeing. For this reason, I voice my support for LD 1955, which at its heart, can help improve access to free an/or affordable hospital care and reduce medical debt for Mainers.

As a doctor, I see firsthand how rising health care costs prevent many of my patients from seeking and getting the care they need and deserve to live full and healthy lives. What is worrisome is how high costs discourage people from seeing a doctor, getting treatment or undergoing therapy that can improve and even save lives.

A [new report](#) shows that the problem of high hospital bills is especially acute, with the wave of consolidations and mergers among large hospital corporations and health systems driving costs up by 25% in our state. Maine now has the devastating distinction of having the highest cost of care in New England. We must ask ourselves as a state and within our communities, are we truly caring for our citizens? I know that my colleagues are doing their best under the conditions of our current systems, but we can do better.

Across Maine, physicians and other healthcare professionals are all too familiar with stories that reflect the fact that our neighbors forgo treatment and ration their care because they have to choose between feeding their family, paying the rent and paying compounding medical bill. A December 2022 poll shows that two-thirds of Mainers say they are just one major medical crisis away from financial ruin.

Hospital consolidations and health system mergers threaten to make the medical debt crisis worse. Large hospital systems dominate market share to the point of a near-monopoly. Nonprofit MaineHealth accounts for two of every three patients in Portland and southern Maine.

It's time for Maine's leaders to act.

LD 1955 can help provide much needed relief for my patients, who are trapped in between the vice of rising out-of-pocket costs in the form of hospital fees and growing medical bills. This legislation would increase eligibility for Maine's Free Care program, require hospitals to widely publicize their free care programs, and reduce red tape for applications. These measures would allow for more of our citizens to avoid medical debt in the first place. LD 1955 would also protect patients from undue collection actions, allowing them to recover from their medical conditions and sort through paperwork at a more reasonable pace. Finally, it would require hospitals to be more transparent with pricing. Maine families facing medical emergencies deserve to know the cost of healthcare and to have the information to plan as best they can.

As a healthcare professional, I firmly believe that Mainers who suffer an illness or an injury should focus on getting well, rather than worrying about whether or not they might go broke. In my years of experience, I know that patients who can devote their energy and attention to recovery enjoy better outcomes than those who must suffer the additional stress of mounting medical bills.

We can be stronger and healthier citizens of Maine. I urge you to stand on the side of patients, provide much-needed relief for Maine families who fall sick or get hurt, and pass LD 1955.