

State of Maine | 131st Legislature
Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
Testimony of Hannah A. Hudson on behalf of Maine Primary Care Association
January 17, 2024

Neither For Nor Against:

LD 1975, “An Act to Implement a Statewide Public Health Response to Substance Use and Amend the Laws Governing Scheduled Drugs”

Sponsored by Representative Crafts

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, I am Hannah Hudson, Director of Policy at Maine Primary Care Association (MPCA).

MPCA is a membership organization representing Maine's Community Health Centers (CHCs), also known as Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs). Maine's CHCs make up the largest independent primary care network in the state, providing high quality and equitable primary and preventive medical, behavioral, and dental health services for over 200,000 people (1 in 6 Mainers) at more than 80 service delivery sites around the State.

They are at the forefront of delivering care to rural and underserved Maine communities. Community Health Centers provide all patients with comprehensive primary care services, as well as a host of other services that include transportation, translation, and case management services, among others. They are further required to provide this care without regard to a patient's insurance status or ability to pay.

We are testifying neither for nor against LD 1975 and wanted to share information with the Committee on the work Community Health Centers are doing across the state to provide care to those managing substance use disorders. CHCs are on the frontlines of this work, have been developing innovative approaches to providing care, and are uniquely positioned to address this crisis in Maine.

CHCs serve as the backbone of primary care in Maine and provide essential behavioral health services, most especially for the state's vulnerable populations and across rural Maine. The model of care delivered by CHCs directly addresses many of the most common reasons people are unable to receive needed Substance Use Disorder (SUD) treatment: financial barriers to care, a lack of available SUD treatment and difficulty accessing needed care, as well as the stigma of receiving SUD services.¹

In 2018, in recognition of the need to allow for members to coordinate and collaborate, MPCA established an Opioid Work Group. In late 2019, all 20 of Maine's CHCs pledged to mobilize to provide a continuous response to the opioid crisis. They developed and signed a *Community Health Center Pledge Regarding Response to the Opioid Crisis*² which outlined efforts that health centers would take to increase capacity to respond to this crisis and maintain a sense of urgency.

Additionally, on November 18, 2021, Penobscot Community Health Care (PCHC) and MPCA launched a joint 12-month Project ECHO on implementation of a low barrier treatment model for Opiate Use

¹ https://www.nachc.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/03/NACHC_PI_2018_WEB_v1.pdf

² <https://www.dropbox.com/s/7cqmo45j7cnf3r7/CHC%20Opioid%20Pledge%202021-11-08-FINAL.pdf?dl=0>

Disorder (OUD).³ The seven participating CHCs, along with PCHC, represented roughly 65% of the total patients served by Maine’s CHC network and encompassed a significant geographic footprint, especially in rural areas. As a result, this pilot supported increased access to vital treatment services in areas most hard-hit by the opiate crisis and aligned with priorities outlined in the treatment and recovery sections of the Governor’s Maine Opioid Response Strategic Action Plan.⁴

CHCs are mobilized to address this epidemic and have continued to build on these foundational network efforts. We know that we must continue this work, increase our capacity to respond to this crisis, and maintain our sense of urgency, but we are limited in what we can do without targeted state investments for CHCs.

Thank you for considering our comments and for your work on this extremely important issue. We appreciate that Representative Crafts has brought forward legislation to provide resources to communities and individuals in need across the state.

MPCA and Maine’s Community Health Center Network is available for any follow up questions, and we would be happy to provide additional information on how we might utilize the kind of funds proposed in this bill to provide recovery and treatment services to those who need it most. Please do not hesitate to contact me directly.

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³ <https://www.mainepublic.org/2021-11-10/medication-first-opioid-treatment-model-expands-to-half-a-dozen-community-health-centers-in-maine>

⁴ https://www.maine.gov/future/sites/maine.gov/future/files/inline-files/MaineOpioidResponse.StrategicActionPlan.FINAL_.12.11.19.pdf