

Maine Chapter

American Academy of Pediatrics 
DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN®

Testimony in support of **LD 2203: An Act to Require Health Insurance Coverage for Federally Approved Nonprescription Oral Hormonal Contraceptives**

Senator Bailey, Representative Perry and distinguished members of the Health Coverage, Insurance & Financial Services Committee, my name is Dr. Julia Oppenheimer, and I live in Portland, Maine. I am a resident physician training in pediatrics. I represent the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics, and thus, represent a large network of pediatricians across the state of Maine. We stand in support of LD 2203, because we believe that equitable access to contraceptives is an essential element of reproductive autonomy and healthcare.

I feel proud and privileged to care for children and adolescents in the state of Maine, and to provide them with the knowledge and access to make informed decisions about their health as they develop into young adults. Educating adolescents about contraceptive methods and supporting their reproductive autonomy is an essential part of preventive healthcare. There are countless reasons that I recommend oral hormonal contraceptives, including management of debilitating heavy menstrual bleeding and menstrual cramping, and prevention of pregnancy. All of these indications empower adolescents to participate in school, sports, arts, social relationships, and career-building activities to their full potential and on their own terms.

I also feel fortunate to be able to discuss contraception confidentially with adolescents. We know that oral hormonal contraceptives are safe and highly effective for people of all ages, including teens.¹ We also know that adolescents are highly capable of taking contraceptives consistently and as directed. Furthermore, being responsible for taking daily medication is a crucial part of learning how to manage their own health as adolescents enter adulthood.

Unfortunately, adolescents encounter many barriers in accessing contraception when a prescription is required from a clinician. First, they may have difficulty missing school or work to schedule an appointment and may not have access to their own transportation. Second, adolescents who attend college or university far from home may have additional barriers to scheduling a visit with their primary care provider, including restrictions on telehealth and out-of-network insurance costs. Finally, while we strive to keep our documentation absolutely confidential, adolescents often worry that this information could be revealed to their parents, and this can lead them to forgo an appointment to discuss contraception altogether. These barriers are greatest for people who do not have easy access to a trusted health care provider or who face stigma or discrimination in the health care system — including Black and Latino communities and other people of color, LGBTQ+ folks, and adolescents.

¹ Upadhyia KK, Santelli JS, Raine-Bennett TR, Kottke MJ, Grossman D. Over-the-Counter Access to Oral Contraceptives for Adolescents. *J Adolesc Health*. 2017 Jun;60(6):634-640. doi: 10.1016/j.jadohealth.2016.12.024. Epub 2017 Mar 14. PMID: 28314704.

Over-the-counter (OTC) availability of oral hormonal contraceptives would absolutely reduce these barriers, as well as the health inequities that they perpetuate. That is why the FDA's approval of the Opill, the first nonprescription daily oral contraceptive, is such an important advancement for adolescent health and reproductive autonomy. However, I worry that the current cost of OTC contraceptive pills - \$40/month - is prohibitive for adolescents. It is essential that Maine lawmakers act now to protect and expand access to OTC contraception.

Leading medical associations including the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists,² the American Medical Association,³ the American Academy of Family Physicians,⁴ and the American Academy of Pediatrics⁵ all agree that birth control pills are safe to use over-the-counter for people of all ages. There are decades of rigorous research and robust evidence to support this. According to a September 2023 report by the Guttmacher Institute, at least twelve states plus Washington, D.C. currently require insurers cover over-the-counter birth control.⁶ Maine currently has a teen pregnancy rate of 7.8 births per 1,000 females aged 15-19, which is the highest in Northern New England.⁷ Covering the cost of OTC contraceptives could reduce unintended pregnancies and improve reproductive health for people of all ages in the state of Maine, particularly adolescents.

We urge you to stand with us to provide insurance coverage for over-the-counter contraceptives, and reduce inequities to reproductive healthcare for adolescents and people of all ages. A vote for LD 2203 is a vote to improve reproductive autonomy and healthcare access for individuals in Maine.

Thank you,

Julia Oppenheimer, MD
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² <https://www.acog.org/clinical/clinical-guidance/committee-opinion/articles/2019/10/over-the-counter-access-to-hormonal-contraception>

³ <https://www.ama-assn.org/press-center/press-releases/ama-urges-fda-make-oral-contraceptive-available-over-counter>

⁴ <https://www.aafp.org/about/policies/all/otc-oral-contraceptives.html>

⁵ <https://www.aap.org/en/news-room/news-releases/aap/2023/aap-statement-on-fdas-approval-of-over-the-counter-birth-control-pill/>

⁶ <https://www.guttmacher.org/state-policy/explore/insurance-coverage-contraceptives>

⁷ <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/pressroom/sosmap/teen-births/teenbirths.htm>