

Testimony in Support of LD 2271, “An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Task Force to Evaluate the Impact of Facility Fees on Patients to Improve Facility Fee Transparency and Notification and to Prohibit Facility Fees for Certain Services”

James Myall

March 19, 2024

Good afternoon, Senator Bailey, Representative Perry, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Care, Insurance, and Financial Services. My name is James Myall. I’m an economic policy analyst at the Maine Center for Economic Policy, and I’m here today to testify in support of LD 2271, “An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Task Force to Evaluate the Impact of Facility Fees on Patients to Improve Facility Fee Transparency and Notification and to Prohibit Facility Fees for Certain Services.” MECEP supports LD 2271 as another step towards making our health care system more transparent, and ultimately more affordable for Mainers.

While the federal and state governments have made strides in addressing the high cost of healthcare in recent years, too many Mainers still struggle to afford potentially lifesaving treatment, and either skip care completely, or end up burdened by high levels of medical debt:

- In 2021, over 65,000 Maine adults had to delay or skip medical care because they could not afford it.¹ The majority of those adults skipping care live in families with less than \$50,000 in income each year, where more than one in eight adults have difficulty affording medical care.
- For Mainers who can access care, debt remains a huge obstacle. According to a recent survey for Consumers for Affordable Health Care, at least 4 out of 10 Mainers have medical debt, and that most with medical debt say that debt comes from services they received through a hospital.²
- Not only does this unaffordability impact Mainers’ physical and mental health, but it can cause severe economic hardships as well. The same CAHC survey³ found six in ten Mainers facing consequences as a result of health care costs, which ranged from using up retirement savings to struggling to pay for necessities such as groceries or heat.⁴

Facility fees are just one item that drives up the cost of health care for Mainers, but they are particularly egregious when they come as a surprise to patients, and when they may not be covered by their insurance company. LD 2271 at least makes patients more aware of potential facility fees, and prevents them being charged when a patient is not in fact using a facility because they are receiving telehealth services. The Taskforce to Evaluate the Impact of Facility Fees on Patients made several recommendations which are not included in LD 2271 but which we believe are worth considering, especially the limits on the use of facility fees outside a hospital setting, and the request for the Maine Health Data Organization to investigate double-charging of fees. Nonetheless, LD 2271 as written is a good first step.

Board of Directors

Barbara Burt, Chair	Sandra Butler	Stacy Mitchell
Lucy Van Hook, Vice-Chair	Maulian Dana	Matt Schlobohm
Pamela Cox, Treasurer	Marcus Hutchins	Lee Webb
Ben Chin, Secretary	Jessica Maurer	

Price transparency isn't the full solution to our overpriced health care system. It's hard to shop around for care when you're suffering from an acute and urgent medical condition. But bills like this which increase transparency in pricing can at least be the foundation of a better health care system for all of us. I urge you to vote "ought to pass" on LD 2271 to make health care in Maine more accountable and more affordable.

As always, I'm happy to answer any questions. I can be reached at jmyall@mecep.org

Notes

¹ US Centers for Disease Control, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance Survey data for 2021.

² Views of Maine Voters on Health Care Affordability: Results on a Survey Conducted on Behalf of Maine Consumers for Affordable Health Care." Digital Research Inc., May 2023.

https://mainecahcorg.presencehost.net/file_download/7383e8ab-ca5a-4569-b9d3-d230b0fb029a

³ "Views of Maine Voters on Health Care Affordability: Results on a Survey Conducted on Behalf of Maine Consumers for Affordable Health Care." Digital Research Inc., May 2023.

https://mainecahcorg.presencehost.net/file_download/7383e8ab-ca5a-4569-b9d3-d230b0fb029a

⁴ James Myall, "Survey results show a "broken" health care system in Maine." Maine Center for Economic Policy. June 21, 2023. <https://www.mecep.org/blog/survey-results-show-a-broken-health-care-system-in-maine/>

James Myall
Maine Center for Economic Policy
LD 2268
Testimony attached *for LD 2271*