

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Health and Human Services Committee:

I am a Family Physician who has practiced primary care in Somerset County since 2016. I am writing in support of LD93, "An Act to Reduce Cost and Increase Access to Disease Prevention by Expanding the Universal Childhood Immunization Program to Include Adults." This bill will be a game-changer for many primary care practices throughout the state when it comes to our ability to provide important vaccines to all our patients.

I can think of many missed opportunities in my practice in which patients were unable to get an important vaccine at our clinic because it was either not covered, too expensive, or needed to be prescribed to and administered at a local pharmacy- costing me time, and more often than not resulting in a patient forgetting or never getting around to having it administered. I remember the Hepatitis A outbreak locally in Skowhegan at a supermarket deli in 2022, which was preceded by an outbreak in food service in Bangor in 2020, and followed by outbreaks in other parts of the state including Lewiston and Westbrook in the past few years. Hepatitis A is now a routine childhood vaccine, but for people who were not born in the twenty-first century (such as myself, and presumably, most of the Committee), it was not. Getting our adult population vaccinated against this preventable disease has proven more challenging than necessary, largely because of these cost and coverage challenges. If we can reduce the barriers as much as possible we can make a big difference in prevention. Right around that time I took care of a patient in his late 50s in the hospital who was in liver failure from acute Hepatitis A, and I thought of how his severe illness could have easily been prevented.

One of the amazing things about vaccines is that when I immunize the person in my office, I am not only protecting that person, but also protecting so many people around them, who will then be prevented from catching a potentially deadly disease from my patient. It matters for the babies who won't get whooping cough (pertussis) because my patient could get their tetanus booster, which includes tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis, and it matters for the elder whose immune system might not have responded so adequately to their flu shot, when their adult child is able to get their flu shot too.

As a Family Doctor, I take care of families, and I also care for the health of my community. Making vaccines more accessible is one of the best ways to do that. Thank you for considering this bill, and I hope you will unanimously support it.

Respectfully,

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