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Testimony in opposition:

LD 84, "An Act to Improve the Coordination of Health Care for Minors in State Care"

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Senator Ingwerson, Representative Meyer and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Laura Harper, I'm a Senior Associate at Moose Ridge Associates and I live in Hallowell. Today I'm testifying on behalf of my client, Maine Family Planning (MFP) in opposition to LD 84. We believe this bill could have a chilling effect on minors' access to sexual and reproductive health care as well as put the providers of such care at risk.

For 50 years, MFP, an independent, private not-for-profit, has served as Maine's statewide grantee for federal Title X funds and for state funds allocated to support the provision of clinical sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services. As the statewide grantee, MFP provides SRH services in 19 sites in some of the state's most rural communities—including Calais, Machias, Rumford and Ft. Kent --and manages subcontracts with a host of community-based providers, including: Planned Parenthood of Northern New England in Southern Maine; 32 Federally Qualified Health Centers with sites throughout the state; and with 8 school-based health centers. Altogether, Maine's sexual and reproductive health care network consists of 63 individual sites.

Maine law currently empowers young people to take control of their sexual and reproductive health, allowing minors to obtain important health care services -- including birth control prescriptions, abortion care, testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections and/or HIV, and gender affirming care -- without notifying or getting permission from a parent or guardian. Pursuant to the statutory provision around family planning services for minors, clinicians make confidential sexual and reproductive health services available to teens in health care settings across the state, from pediatricians' offices to family planning clinics to emergency rooms treating survivors of sexual assault.

Happily, many young people choose voluntarily to involve a safe adult in their sexual and reproductive health care decisions. All teens who come into a Maine Family Planning health center are counseled by an experienced medical professional about the benefit of involving a parent or guardian. The majority of our teen patients are able to do so.

But some are not. And it's those young people we are most concerned about. Because those teens who can't talk to an adult about sexual and reproductive health care don't stop having sex. Instead, they just stop getting the health care they need. A 2019 [survey](#) of youth ages 14 to 24, published in the Journal of Pediatrics, found youth may lie about their risk behaviors or not seek health care when concerned about confidentiality.

LD 84, while well-intentioned, has the potential to send a dangerous message to teens at risk of state-custody; when forced to leave your family, you lose control of your private, sensitive health care information too. Not only could this bill endanger teens who face a risk of abuse or violence in their lives, but it also places them at risk for unintended pregnancy, untreated STIs, and unhealthy relationships.

Leading medical organizations agree that confidentiality is critical to building trust between patients and providers. According to the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecology, “Confidential care for adolescents is important because it encourages access to care and increases discussions about sensitive topics and behaviors that may substantially affect their health and well-being.”

Combined with comprehensive, age-appropriate, and inclusive sexuality education, access to health care can help young Mainers build healthy futures and families. According to the Alan Guttmacher Institute, Maine’s teen birth rate declined 76 percent between 1991 and 2020. Between 1988 and 2013, the state’s teen pregnancy rate declined 65 percent.

Furthermore, providers of sexual and reproductive health care are under attack. Harassment, threats of violence, and vandalism are regular occurrences at our Maine clinics. All across our country, clinicians face politically-motivated challenges to providing safe, evidence-based, medical care to teens and adults alike. LD 84 has the potential to expose our providers, creating an increased safety risk for them and our health centers.

For these reasons we urge you to either vote LD 84 “ought not to pass” or to work carefully to craft an amendment that upholds Maine teens’ right to privacy. Thank you.