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Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Committee on Health and Human Services,

My name is Brian Youth, and I am a pediatrician and the President of the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics (Maine AAP). The Maine AAP is a membership organization of 300 pediatricians and subspecialists across the state. I am testifying in favor of LD 689, An Act to Support the Northern New England Poison Center.

Poisoning is a common, and often extremely dangerous, pediatric event. When a child accidentally ingests a cleaning product, a medication, or even a substance like cannabis or fentanyl, the Northern New England Poison Center (NNEPC) is just a phone call or text message away, and available around the clock. In a moment of panic and fear, the child's caregiver can be quickly connected with a trained professional who responds calmly with crucial information on how to help the child experiencing a potentially severe reaction or whose life may be in danger. In many circumstances, the guidance provided can literally save the child's life.

Of the 32,000 poisoning cases managed by the NNEPC each year, 14,000 originate from Maine, and 3,500 involve children under the age of 6. While Maine children and adults benefit greatly from the 24/7 emergency response services provided by the NNEPC, the State of Maine financially contributes less than neighboring states New Hampshire and Vermont.

Supporting the NNEPC is crucial to ensuring that Maine children and families receive the help they need, while avoiding additional strain on the healthcare system. If NNEPC response services become unavailable, most families in crisis will call 911 or take their child to an emergency room or other urgent health facility. These options are not only costly but strain our healthcare system and potentially put children in dangerous and risky situations. In rural areas where emergency services may not be nearby or accessible around the clock, the services provided by NNEPC are vital.

In a time where health misinformation runs rampant online, having a service like the NNEPC that can provide trusted and accurate medical treatment advice to families is of the utmost importance. As a state, we must support sources of evidence-based medical advice, especially when families are in crisis and seeking a solution for how to help a loved one. In a frightening situation where a parent or caregiver may have nowhere else to turn but to the internet, the NNEPC is there to provide necessary and accurate medical information.

LD 689 is a straightforward, common sense, and no-frills piece of legislation. If passed, LD 689 would allocate \$335,000 from the general fund to the NNEPC for fiscal years 2025-2026 and 2026-2027. This is a low price for 24-hour expert medical treatment advice and information that serves 14,000 Mainers each year and saves countless lives.

As a pediatrician, I don't want to imagine a Maine where families and caregivers don't have access to the services provided by the NNEPC. The Maine AAP respectfully urges the committee to vote 'Ought to Pass' on LD 689, An Act to Support the Northern New England Poison Center.

Brian Youth, MD

President, Maine Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics