



Committee on Health and Human Services  
**Re: LD 70 - An Act to Fund Free Health Clinics**

March 13, 2025

Dear Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Gia Drew and I am the Executive Director of EqualityMaine, which has been advocating on behalf of Maine's LGBTQ+ community since 1984. We urge you to support LD 70 in order to ensure all Mainers have access to healthcare and can move across boundaries to care.

Across the state, and in seven different counties, there are approximately eight free healthcare clinics operating independently or with other organizations servicing thousands of patients a year,<sup>1</sup> though not all receive funding from the state. Patients accessing these services are largely low-income who are at or below 200% poverty level and have high deductible insurance or none at all<sup>2</sup>. These marginalized groups may only be accessing care through these free clinics, due to their physical proximity, making them essential and causing stress when these services are not available.

LGBTQ+ people experience even higher levels of stress as outlined by the social determinants of health. These are non-medical factors that affect mental and physical health at higher rates over the span of someone's life like anti-LGBTQ+ policy, discrimination, violence, or a hostile climate. Stemming from this stress, LGBTQ+ populations face higher rates of mental and physical health disparities, and on top of this, 21% of LGBTQ+ people also experience poverty at a higher rate than non-LGBTQ+ people<sup>3</sup>. This rate of poverty combined with a higher likelihood of mental and physical health issues makes free healthcare clinics even more necessary and beneficial to the community.

In 2023 alone, there was an 80% increase in patient demand, making clinics more needed than ever.<sup>4</sup> Research also shows that the cost of operating these healthcare clinics has risen

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<sup>1</sup>Maine Medical Association, "Free Clinics in Maine",  
<https://mainephysicians.org/mma-resource/free-clinics-in-maine/>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Lampe, N., et al. "Health Disparities Among Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Older Adults: A Structural Competency Approach". SAGE Choice. vol. 98, iss. 1, 2024, pp. 39-55,  
<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10598237/>

<sup>4</sup> The National Association of Free & Charitable Clinics, "Amidst Medicaid Unwinding, 80% of Free Clinics are Experiencing an Increase in Demand", 2024,

in the past 20 years. While this bill proposes that the state allocate \$250,000 to the clinics in Maine, in 2019 the average operating cost of a free clinic was \$387,252.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, for certain services people may have to pay a small fee. Thus, we propose that the allocation of funds be increased to account for inflation, rising operating costs and patient demand, and for the benefit of people in Maine accessing these services who deserve to do so with as few barriers as possible.

According to a study on the expansion of access to free clinics, long patient wait-times, which are standard for free health clinics, can impact patient satisfaction and decrease the number of patients a provider can see in a day.<sup>6</sup> This furthers health disparities by discouraging a patient from coming back to the clinic, which can lead to misdiagnosis, miscommunications, and inconsistency, adding to stressors patients already experience on a day-to-day basis. By increasing funding, a clinic can hire more providers, expanding the number of people they care for in addition to offering more jobs for a community and developing better patient care and satisfaction.

The impact that free health clinics have on vulnerable communities is immense and can often be immediate. A trip to the free clinic for an uninsured or low-income person may just save their life. We ask you to vote “ought to pass” on LD 70 to ensure that people in Maine have access to the care they need. Healthcare is a human right and as providers are seeing an increase in demand, there has never been a more critical time to invest in Maine’s healthcare system.

Thank you,

Gia Drew (she/her)

Executive Director, EqualityMaine

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<https://nafcclinics.org/amidst-medicaid-unwinding-80-of-free-clinics-are-experiencing-an-increase-in-demand/#:~:text=Alexandria%2C%20VA%2C%20March%2026%2C.and%20needs%20of%20healthcare%20in>

<sup>5</sup> Stillmank, E., et al, “A Cost-Benefit Analysis of A Community Free Clinic. Journal of Community Health Nursing”, vol. 36, iss. 2, 2019, pg 91-101, <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30990744/>

<sup>6</sup> Davidian, A., et al., “Improving Patient Care: Expansion of Access to Free Clinics. Patient Experience Journal”, vol. 11 iss. 2, 2024, pp. 115-120, <https://pxjournal.org/journal/vol11/iss2/14/>