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March 24, 2025

Subject: LD 1028: "Resolve, to Establish the Task Force to Study Equitable Access to Maternal Health Care and Birthing Facilities"

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Joe Anderson. I am a resident of Portland, a pediatric hospitalist in Lewiston, and I serve on the board of the Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics. I am writing today to express our support for LD 1028. **We ask that you vote Ought to Pass on this bill.** As pediatricians, we are deeply invested in ensuring that every child has the healthiest possible start in life, and that begins with high-quality, accessible maternal health care.

Maine is facing a crisis in maternal & child health access. In just the last several years, the towns of Lincoln, Calais, Bridgton, York, Rumford, Fort Kent, Waterville, and Belfast have all lost their sole labor & delivery units. Only 20 obstetric units remain in operation across the state today. These closures force pregnant individuals to travel long distances to receive necessary care – and the data will undoubtedly show an increase in unplanned and dangerous out-of-hospital births in the coming years as a result.

Beyond the immediate health consequences, the loss of labor and delivery units has profound economic and social effects on Maine's rural communities. Towns that lose their birthing units become less attractive to young families, who may relocate to areas with better healthcare access, accelerating population decline. A study published in Health Affairs found that rural hospital closures lead to a reduction in women of reproductive age in affected areas, impacting local economies and making it harder for businesses to attract and retain employees¹.

We know this crisis is the result of several factors. Inadequate reimbursements for maternity care, staffing challenges in rural areas, and declining birth rates all play a role, and are difficult issues to address. However, the legislature has an opportunity to undertake an in-depth analysis of the problem at hand, consider creative solutions to stop the trend of labor & delivery unit closures across our state, and to build safety nets for the families most affected by these closures.

The Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics strongly supports LD 1028 to protect maternal and infant health. Our state's future depends on the well-being of our children and the mothers who bring them into this world.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Joe Anderson, DO, FAAP

Advocacy Chair, Maine Chapter of the American Academy of Pediatrics

¹ Kozhimannil, K. B., Chen, L., & Hung, P. (2020). "The Impact of Hospital Closures on Maternal Health Services in Rural Communities." *Health Affairs*, 39(9), 1596-1604. DOI: 10.1377/hlthaff.2020.00723