Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson and Honorable Members of the Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services Committee:

My name is Kimberly Simmons, I live in Portland, and I am writing to testify in favor of LD 1688.

I have lived in Maine for most of my life, and recognize that our healthcare system is quite fragile. We have limited time with our PCPs if we're lucky enough to have one, are increasingly waiting for referrals to specialists, and we are expected to be our own sleuths and advocates when anything unexpected arises. We also are experiencing many new threats, in part due to climate change and the rise in tick borne illnesse, mosquitoes transmitting illnesses, etc.

My worry about Lyme's disease can ruin my time in the outdoors. My fear stems from watching those I care about drop through a floor of endless run-around, with few answers or support and many many symptoms dismissed as "stress" or "depression" by providers who seem unwilling to learn more. We know enough to know that we are likely to find the health care system at best frustrating and at worst threatening, and that's a sorry state for all of us. These pressures will continue to grow. In the case of Lyme, presuming individuals will simply protect ourselves from exposure is not a public health measure (see this study from Canada). The increased risk of Lyme's disease means an increased need for physicians who understand the complexity of the disease in its acute and ongoing phases.

Personally, I experienced a relatively small problem after my first bout with Covid, which was the onset of tinnitus. While not significant enough to ruin my health (some are so bothered it is genuinely life threatening), it was unnerving. My desire to address this led me to 5 different medical providers, including a trip to Boston on my own dime, and my experience was that providers were dismissive and behind with regard to the research on this issue, creating more confusion for me and encouraging me to rely on "Dr. Google" which no one wants! This frustrating experience was a tiny slice of how absolutely impossible it can feel to navigate this system with a more serious or debilitating condition, and my empathy for people with more significant chronic illness grew larger! This is an area where perhaps *when you know, you know*,and it's personal experience that sparks collective change.

LD 1688 is a gentle bill, encouraging rather than mandating. This is an appropriate role for the Government, and communicates to providers (whose pay is supplemented by our shared tax dollars) that the public's needs are not being met. We likely need larger underlying reforms to allow us to receive the health care we deserve in a rural state. However, in the short term, encouraging our medical schools (considered broadly) to provide more evidence-based training and encouraging providers to seek it out will help us meet the upcoming waves of public health chronic illness with more compassion, clarity and cutting-edge knowledge. Maine people deserve this, and high quality health care will help Maine grow.

Thank you,

Kimberly Simmons