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Testimony of Rep. Cassie Julia in support of

LD 1688, An Act to Encourage Continuing Education Relating to Certain Infection-associated Chronic Conditions for Physicians and Nurses

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services

Good afternoon, Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson and esteemed members of the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Committee. My name is Cassie Julia, and I represent House District 65, which includes part of Waterville. I write to you today in support of **LD 1688, An Act to Encourage Continuing Education Relating to Certain Infection-associated Chronic Conditions for Physicians and Nurses**.

As I've shared with this committee before, ten years ago, I became seriously ill with Babesia — a tick-borne illness that, at the time, was barely on the radar of medical professionals in Maine. I spent two years bouncing between doctors and specialists who couldn't figure out what was wrong. By the time I received a diagnosis, the infection had progressed and triggered a complex autoimmune disorder.

To this day, I've encountered very few doctors who even know how to recognize, let alone treat, that autoimmune condition. One of the only things that has kept me afloat is the informal network of patients — people who've had to become experts in their own illnesses just to survive. We lean on each other constantly because in many cases, we are each other's only roadmap to anything resembling a normal life.

That should never be the case in a modern healthcare system.

Maine's medical providers — including physicians, physician assistants, and nurses — urgently need better continuing education resources to identify and treat infection-associated chronic conditions and autoimmune complications more effectively. These are not fringe illnesses. They are increasingly common, often debilitating and routinely missed or dismissed.

The federal CDC, under the Biden Administration, flagged Maine as under-diagnosing tick-borne diseases by a factor of ten. That should be a wake-up call. But our own state CDC has

downplayed the issue and, to date, has taken no meaningful steps to correct it. As a result, many providers treat these illnesses with the same level of urgency as the common cold.

To make matters worse, many providers who move here from outside of New England arrive without training in the infectious disease patterns that are increasingly prevalent in our state. That's understandable — what's not understandable is the lack of any statewide training mandate to close that gap. Last year, Representative Dan Shagoury attempted to address this. The CDC said they would “do better.”

But I have yet to see or hear any evidence that they have.

Many of the conditions addressed in this bill — including long COVID, POTS, chronic Lyme disease and others — have autoimmune features that are frequently misdiagnosed or ignored. But with proper training, these conditions can be identified earlier and treated more effectively, dramatically improving outcomes and quality of life for patients.

Expanding provider knowledge through continuing education is one of the most powerful tools we have to reduce misdiagnosis, prevent long-term disability and ensure Mainers get the care they deserve.

Thank you for your time and your consideration of LD 1688.