

Testimony in Support of LD 1578: An Act to Require the Department of Health and Human Services to Review Disruption to or Removal of Health Services

May 7, 2025

Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony. My name is Michael Towey and I'm from Belfast. I recently retired after a 48-year career in healthcare. I am speaking in strong support of LD 1578.

This bill is important for ensuring communities have a voice when major changes to local healthcare services are proposed. Under current practice, decisions—such as the closure of labor and delivery services, shift of cardiology medical staff to another facility, reduction in access to audiology and other services at Waldo County Hospital—have been made behind closed doors, in corporate offices removed from communities. The result is a community left feeling powerless, disconnected, and disrespected.

Why LD 1578 is Important

- Empowers communities to have a say in major healthcare service changes.
- Current decisions often made behind closed corporate doors.
- Communities left powerless, disconnected, disrespected.

Waldo County Hospital

- Delivered babies successfully for 120+ years.
- Maintained services through provider shortages and changing birth rates.
- Merger with MaineHealth shifted governance far from local community.
- Despite \$60 million investment to MH and proven success, labor and delivery services closed and other services have been shifted to another facility.
- Corporate priorities trumped local healthcare needs—without community input.

The Broader Context: MaineHealth Consolidation

- MaineHealth merger example:
 - Maine Medical Center (MMC) merged with Southern Medical Center (SMMC - Biddeford).
- A Certificate of Public Advantage (COPA), was approved by Maine DHHS used to avoid FTC scrutiny.

- After State oversight, under terms of the COPA ended:
 - MMC and SMMC hospital charges increased by 45%.

Impact of Lack of Meaningful Input:

- MaineHealth owns:
 - 25% of Maine's hospitals.
 - 145 clinics.
- Maine hospitals charge:
 - 275% of Medicare rates on average.
 - Nearly three times the national average.

Importance of LD 1578; Statewide community disruptions seen across Maine in recent months over hospital closing and changes in services *may have been mitigated with* the passage of LD 1578. It seems like a small ask to require these multibillion-dollar healthcare corporations, enjoying hundreds of millions of dollars in tax-free status to be a bit more responsive to their communities. A modicum of reasonable oversight as proposed in LD 1578 is only reasonable.

Thank you for your attention.

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