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Maine Equal Justice

People Policy Solutions

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Testimony in Support of LD 2151, An Act to Improve Access to Affordable Prescription Drugs in Underserved Areas

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Good afternoon Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson, and members of the Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services. My name is Alex Carter, I use she/her pronouns, and I am a Senior Policy Advocate at Maine Equal Justice (MEJ), a nonprofit civil legal aid provider working to increase economic security, opportunity, and equity for people in Maine. Through direct legal representation and systemic advocacy, MEJ represents thousands of people a year who experience financial and structural barriers to meeting their basic needs. I write in support of LD 2151 and in support of improved access to prescription drugs for Mainers with low-income in underserved areas.

Lack of access to affordable prescription drugs is a national and statewide challenge, further compounded by poverty and geography. Many of our clients with low-income struggle to access necessary health services and prescription medications and rely on Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs) or Community Health Centers to fill the gap. FQHCs provide primary and preventive care to nearly 1 in 6 Mainers—regardless of their ability to pay—and are an evermore vital part of Maine’s healthcare safety net.

Although MaineCare covers prescriptions for most people up to 138% of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL), many of Maine’s more rural and marginalized residents live in areas considered “pharmacy deserts,” or a region without ready access to pharmacy services. For those without reliable transportation, with disabilities or with caretaking responsibilities, even a short distance can pose an unsurmountable barrier to receiving necessary treatment. Furthermore, our clients who are just above income for MaineCare, or immigrants without a qualifying status for MaineCare or Marketplace coverage, find it especially challenging to afford and access their necessary medications. For people with no or low income who lack quality health insurance, paying hundreds of dollars out-of-pocket for a prescription is an impossibility.

LD 2151 provides one-time funding for the Maine Center of Disease Control and Prevention to support FQHCs, that are prioritized in areas of high need, to develop or expand their in-

house pharmacy services, removing a primary obstacle to prescription drug access in those communities. This one-time investment could be transformation for the lives of many people currently marginalized by our health care system at a time when the federal government is disinvesting in our residents and their health care.

We previously supported this initiative in our testimony on last year's supplemental budget, and we were disappointed to see the rescission of the funding. We hope to see the passage of LD 2151 this session and the restoration of funding for this innovative program.

Thank you,

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