

Testimony in Support:

LD 2088 "An Act to Increase Access to Primary Care Provided by Physician Associates."

Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Service Committee

Jan 29, 2026

Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson, and members of the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Committee, my name is Laura Withers, MD. I am a resident of Portland, Maine. After many years practicing surgery in Portland, I am away for a year doing a fellowship in Palliative Care in Columbia, Missouri. Both states have a lot of rural communities, and citizens who have to go a long way for health care. My fellowship gives me more direct experience with the burden on primary care providers as there are too few to adequately serve their communities. I also hear a lot from patients who struggle to get care. I have worked the physician Associates (Pas) throughout my career and know I can trust their level of education and skills to provide excellent care. All of this experience compels me to submit testimony in support of LD 2088 "An Act to Increase Access to Primary Care Provided by Physician Associates."

The state of Maine and the federal government recognize the importance of creating excellent and sustainable rural health programs. The Rural Health Transformation Program, funded in December 2025, specifically notes the strategic goal to "develop a broader set of providers to serve a rural community's needs, such as community health workers, pharmacists, and individuals trained to help patients navigate the healthcare system." PAs are in a perfect position to help us meet that goal. Removing restrictions that prevent Pas from practicing in setting where a physician is not a partner would allow them to practice to their fullest potential and increase the provider workforce in the communities that need it the most. Wisely, this bill maintains the requirement that PAs with less than 4,000 hours of clinical practice have physician collaboration while also allowing experienced PAs to practice at the top of their capability. Additionally, LD 2088's proposed changes promote greater parity with nurse practitioners who, under Maine law in effect since 1995, can practice independent of a physician regardless of the practice setting, after a two-year supervision period. Both physicians and PAs remain deeply dedicated to revolutionizing healthcare in our nation through collaborative, patient-focused medical care. The collaborative nature of our healthcare system would not change with this new law. What this bill would change is the rules

that limit opportunities for PAs to be part of the solution to the provider shortage that frustrates people and worsens health care in this state.

We remain united with our healthcare colleagues in a shared mission to provide safe and effective care to all patients through a patient-centered and team-based approach while continuing to be thoughtful in how we approach solutions to access to care which is why I urge you to vote “ought to pass” on LD 2088.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "L. Withers".

Laura Withers, M.D.

Portland, Maine