

Testimony of Lani Graham, MD, MPH

IN SUPPORT OF LD 1204

An Act to Improve the Health of Maine Residents by Closing Coverage Gaps in the MaineCare program for Incarcerated Persons

Presented by Speaker Talbot Ross

Before the Health and Human Services Committee, April 12, 2023

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Lani Graham. I am a former Chief Public health Officer for Maine. I serve on the Public Health Committee (PHC) of the Maine Medical Association (MMA) and am here representing the Maine Medical Association. I live in Freeport.

I had not intended to testify on this bill as I have other priorities and LD 1204 as originally presented, while worthy, did not rise to the top of my list. However, I was alerted this morning that an amendment has been presented by the sponsor, which requires the Department of Health and Human Services to apply for a waiver that would allow the incarcerated in Maine to become eligible for MaineCare prior to release. This proposal, which I have yet to see, skyrocketed the bill to the top of my list. I hope my informants were correct.

You have likely heard some of the background on this amendment from the sponsor but let me tell you a bit about the history of physician interest in this waiver. I started working on the idea last fall when I learned that nine or ten other states, as diverse as Kentucky and Vermont, were already enjoying the benefits of the waiver. Since that time, California has jumped in with an even more expansive waiver. I brought the matter up to the PHC of the Maine Medical Association in October and all the physicians in attendance supported the idea of Maine DHHS applying for a waiver. One reason given was that, rather than providing medical care, staff in physician offices had to spend valuable time that should have been spent on medical care, helping recently released persons apply for MaineCare. Another reason given was that people with substance use disorders often had not been properly treated prior to release, making resuming care for that chronic

illness more difficult. Another reason given was that these incarcerated people often had difficult problems that required prompt attention, but those released had little understanding about attaining health care. After a relatively short discussion, the Committee urged staff at the MMA to contact Maine DHHS about applying for the waiver.

Since that time, I personally have contacted the Sherriff's Association and the Commissioner of the Maine Department of Correction to encourage support for a Maine application for this waiver. It seems like a win for everyone. Those returning to the Community will be healthier and ready to return to a better life, those staffing the jails and prisons can more easily get needed care for those they are holding, physicians will be able to provide better and more immediate care to those who need it, and federal dollars will help support the effort.

I am aware that Maine could apply for a limited waiver with a focus on substance use disorders or a more general waiver. I hope that Maine will follow the example of California and other states that have applied for the general waiver. But I understand that this will be up to the good judgment of the Maine Department of Health and Human Services.

Thank you for your attention and I would be pleased to answer any questions you might have.