

Maine County Commissioners Association

4 Gabriel Drive, Suite 2 Augusta, ME 04330, 207-623-4697
www.mainecontinies.org

LD 1204, An Act to Improve the Health of Maine Residents by Closing Coverage Gaps in the MaineCare Program for Incarcerated Persons

April 12, 2023

Chair Baldacci, Chair Meyer, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Stephen Gorden and in addition to serving as a member of the board of commissioners for Cumberland County, I am writing today in my role as chair of the legislative policy committee of the Maine County Commissioners Association. We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony on this bill, and we are pleased to report that our Board is in unanimous support of this bill, as amended.

About MCCA. Briefly, the Maine County Commissioners Association was established in 1890 to assist Maine's county government in providing vital services to Maine citizens in a responsive, efficient, and credible manner. The Association is based in Augusta, represents all 16 of Maine's counties, and is governed by a board with representation from each participating county.

Discussion. Our Association has reviewed LD 1204 in its original form and we understand that the bill's sponsor is planning to amend the bill to direct the State to apply for a waiver with the federal government to permit inmates in correctional facilities, including county jails, who are MaineCare recipients to retain their eligibility for such benefits while incarcerated.

By way of background, when an inmate who is otherwise eligible to receive Medicaid benefits is incarcerated, that person loses their Medicaid benefits as a result of federal law. As a consequence, the medical costs for such individuals fall onto the operators of correctional facilities, which include county jails operated by county government. For years, state and local governments around the country have tried to change this law, and even as we speak, there are efforts underway in Congress to modify the law. But to date, no change has occurred. As a result, county jails in Maine end up spending millions of dollars each year to provide medical services to hundreds if not thousands of individuals whose medical costs could otherwise be paid for substantially by Medicaid. Some of these costs are indirectly borne by state taxpayers who share in the operating costs of county jails, but the bulk of these costs fall onto local property taxpayers.

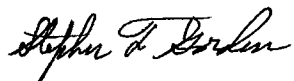
Our Association supports the important goal of ensuring that incarcerated persons – including those in county jails – have the opportunity to retain their MaineCare eligibility while incarcerated. Not only does this work to ensure the health and safety of individual while they are incarcerated, but it also reduces the risk to such individuals when they are released who often have a gap in medical coverage until MaineCare eligibility is restored. Accordingly, we write in strong support of LD 1204, as amended.

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Conclusion. We appreciate the opportunity to provide testimony in support of this bill, and if you have questions or need additional information, please do not hesitate to let us know.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Stephen Gorden". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'S'.

Stephen Gorden
Chair, Legislative Policy Committee

cc: Commissioner Richard Dutremble, President, MCCA
James I. Cohen, Verrill Dana, LLP, MCCA Legislative Counsel