

Good morning, Senator Bailey, Representative Perry and Members of the Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services Committee.

My name is Marylou Nesbitt and I come to you as:

- a resident of Cape Elizabeth,
- an oncology nurse for more than 40 years, currently working with the Dana-Farber Cancer Institute.
- also representing the Oncology Nursing Society, which is in support of this bill, and represent the countless oncology nurses in our state.

I am here to testify in support of LD 1577, an important bill that will support oncology nurses, like me, to have the confidence that we can ALWAYS provide the best standard of care treatments for our patients with cancer.

The major focus of my practice has been with cancer chemotherapy administration and have taught hundreds of nurses what they need to know and do to demonstrate competency in administering cancer chemotherapy. We are now giving medications, targeted to a patient's specific tumor biology, requiring the additional verification of testing specific to these new personalized medications recommended in treatment planning.

This nursing role of giving a potential lifesaving treatment is a privilege. During treatment administration, our patients seek information and reassurances that we are giving them the best, state of science treatments which will hopefully keep their cancer in check. Many heart felt questions arise such as,

- Do you think this will help me?
- Is this the best treatment available?
- Do other patients like me have this treatment?
- Should I go to a large cancer center for consultation?

All patients in Maine, with a diagnosis of cancer, need to feel confident, that their oncologist has been able to pursue, without barriers of cost, the data needed to employ optimal cancer treatment specific to relevant markers the patient's tumor may or may not express. Nurses know these criteria and will answer their patients' questions honestly, which is critical to our therapeutic relationship with our patients, families and Maine community.

It is this person with cancer, that I want you to keep in mind when considering the bill in front of you today. Imagine this friend or family member is meeting with their oncologist and learns that there is specialized testing, biomarker testing, that can help the oncologist decide what treatments might work best to target their cancer or what treatments are likely to not be necessary.

This can be a treatment so precise that it targets the individual's specific biology in hopes to keep that cancer from destroying their vital organ functions. It is a treatment that treats the patient as an individual instead of as a disease. Now imagine that the oncologist has to tell your loved one that despite the availability of this life-giving testing, his or her insurance won't cover it and the patient will have to decide if they can afford to pay for the test out-of-pocket. This patient has been paying insurance premiums because he or she thought it would provide them with the peace of mind that if

they were diagnosed with a serious illness like cancer, they would be able to afford the tests and treatment needed to hopefully save their life.

Oncologists and oncology nurses should be treating their patients with the best standard of care, not basing treatment decisions on the demands of insurers. First and foremost, all Maine residents, who have cancer deserve to have access to clinically appropriate care and the best information available to make informed decisions about their care.

By passing this bill, you will also save the clinical staff who now have to dedicate many hours of time to find ways patients can get these tests paid for when their insurance does not cover them, and they can't afford the out-of-pocket costs. This is time that is not reimbursable and is factored into the costs of care for everyone. Moreover, the nurses and social workers who are spending these countless hours advocating for this type of testing can get off their phones and return to their patients' bedside, where they belong. So, while the primary goal of this legislation is to help patients get coverage, there is an impactful secondary effect in optimizing the nursing resources that our patients need by their side, resources that are already strained across the state.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide my thoughts about the impact that you can have on Maine residents needing cancer treatment by voting in support of LD 1577.