

Testimony in favor of LD 329 – May 9 2023

Good morning, Senator Bailey, Representative Perry, and members of HCIFs. My name is Geoff Gratwick, I am a retired doctor from Bangor, and it was my great privilege to serve in the Legislature recently. I am here to speak in favor of LD 329.

To start with a view from 30,000 feet. Our current non-system of HC is nuts, crazy. If you asked a group of drunk chimpanzees to design a HC system ours is what they would have produced. It is OK if you are rich but gets a failing grade if you are middle class or low income.

There have been many efforts to change since 2003, almost all incremental. The gains have been minimal. We are still failing. The reality: We need a quantum leap if we are to have a HC system that works for everyone – that is simple, affordable, equitable, efficient, quality

The barrier to this is CMS. It holds the Purse strings. To get waivers you need a plan but we haven't been willing to put the work in to get a plan without guarantee of waiver. There is a circularity here that leads to a dead end.

There are three current initiatives to deal with this problem:

- 1.) Office of Affordable HC (OAH 7/21). This is an independent state agency, not wedded to the two-year cycle. It has its own funding, own staff, impressive mandates, both broad and specific. I am a fan. Meg Garratt-Reed is excellent. The problem: it is being starved. It needs staff of at least 10-20?
- 2.) LD 1045 – The concept behind this is to wait for CMS to come to its senses and allow states to be inventive; according to the language of 0145 these waivers must come first. Only then will Maine begin to work on its HC plan which will take 2-3 years
- 3.) LD 329 is 1045 on steroids, a short circuit. It allows Maine to begin planning now, so that we have a shovel plan ready when CMS comes to its senses.

The challenge for you, members of HCIFS is how to put teeth into 329, make it a real force for ongoing good. 6 months is not enough time to develop a viable HC plan. You need a lot of input, at least a year or two. If you are going to reform HC give yourself enough time to do it right. Options:

- 1.) Expand LD 329's mandate, make it an independent state agency, give it staff, fund it. Put fire in its belly.
- 2.) Or, amend Office of Affordable HC statute. Change its primary focus from incrementalism to determining out how to get waivers. Meg Garrett -Reed will be good at this. The great advantage is that this Office already exists and is an **independent state agency** --it needs passionate advocates to get it more funds and staff

Either way will require you to howl in front of Appropriations. If you don't get funds, you might as well forget about all these proposals. They will end up on dusty shelves.

I don't underestimate the challenges you face. I was very involved with the HC Task Force, 2017-18. It was a lot of work. Recommendations were excellent – but very little came of them. My conclusion – nothing will happen without an independent state agency with its own funding.

Please think big – You will save lives, save money, earn praise from future legislators and your constituents. There are a whole lot of people out here willing to help with the specifics