



Statement of Abbie Strout-Bentes, Director of Community Engagement, Mabel
Wadsworth Center to the Joint Standing Committee of Judiciary

May 1, 2023

LD 1619 and LD 1343
Ought to Pass

Senator Carney, Representative Moonen, and members of the joint standing committee on Judiciary, thank you for hearing my testimony today. My name is Abbie Strout-Bentes, and I am here today as a representative of Mabel Wadsworth Center in Bangor. Mabel Wadsworth Center is a feminist sexual and reproductive health center that provides a wide range of services, including abortion care, prenatal care, STI testing and treatment, gender-affirming hormone therapy, mental health counseling, and primary care services.

We are here to share our support of LD 1619 An Act to Improve Maine's Reproductive Privacy Laws and LD 1343 An Act to Protect the Reproductive Freedom of Maine People by Preempting the Field of Abortion Regulation. Both of these bills are important to ensure and protect access to pregnancy care for everyone in Maine.

There are many components to these two bills and since you are hearing from a lot of people today on the different pieces, we decided to focus our testimony on the changes LD 1619 will make to the way abortion data is collected by the state and why it is needed.

Our organization has been providing abortion care for almost three decades. Throughout the years, advancements in the field have led to changes in the care we offer, for example, the addition of medication abortion 23 years ago. Additionally, as an organization committed to providing person-centered, trauma-informed, and non-judgmental care, we are continuously making changes to the language we use and updating our medical history form to ensure we are not unintentionally causing harm or amplifying shame and only gathering the information we need to provide quality care.

The one thing that has not changed in these years is the way in which we've gathered data for the state of Maine.

Gathering data is important for public health. However, it has been clear to us for many years that we need to update this law to ensure the data collected are not stigmatizing or harmful. Since the Dobbs decision overturning Roe, it has become urgent to ensure privacy. In the past year, we have seen an increase in politically motivated attacks on clinicians and patients in states with abortion bans and states where abortion is legal. At this moment, it is critical that any sensitive information is protected and that we are only collecting necessary information to protect patients and providers.

The change made in this law prioritizes the protection of patient privacy while ensuring appropriate data is collected.

Thank you for your time.