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**Statement of Ceilidh Shea, Consumers for Affordable Health Care
to the Joint Standing Committee On Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services**

Speaking in Support of:

LD 2175, An Act to Improve Access to Affordable Prescription Drugs in Underserved Areas

February 29, 2024

Senator Bailey, Representative Perry, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee On Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services, thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments in support of LD 2175, An Act to Improve Access to Affordable Prescription Drugs in Underserved Areas.

My name is Ceilidh Shea and I am a Policy Advocate at Consumers for Affordable Health Care, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that advocates the right to quality, affordable health care for every person in Maine. As designated by Maine's Attorney General, CAHC serves as Maine's Health Insurance Consumer Assistance Program (CAP), which operates a toll-free HelpLine. Our HelpLine, fields approximately 7,000 calls and emails every year from people across Maine who need help obtaining, keeping, using, or fixing problems with private health insurance or with accessing or affording health care services. CAHC also serves as the Ombudsman program for Maine's Medicaid program, MaineCare, and helps people apply for and navigate the enrollment process for MaineCare. It is with that background that we provide these comments.

LD 2175 would direct the Office of Affordable Health Care to provide support for federally qualified health centers (FQHCs) to develop or expand their capacity to provide access to affordable prescription drugs to patients by increasing the centers' ability to deliver pharmacy services to those patients.

Maine is one of the most rural states in the country. We've increasingly seen the effects of rurality on healthcare delivery for Mainers throughout the state. It is becoming increasingly difficult for those in rural areas to find providers, pharmacies, or healthcare delivery sites within reasonable distance. It is particularly difficult for low-income Mainers to spend hours on the road to get to their closest pharmacy or PCP office. FQHCs act as an important healthcare safety net and make up the largest independent primary care network in Maine, providing care to populations regardless of health insurance status or ability to pay. FQHCs offer primary and

preventive medical, behavioral, and dental health services to one in six Maine people at more than 80 service delivery sites across the state. This bill would ensure FQHCs are able to continue adequately serving their communities and are better able to help patients access to affordable prescription drugs.

In a 2022 survey sponsored by CAHC, we found that more than half of Mainers are concerned that cost will prevent them from accessing prescription drugs or medicine they need.¹

Additionally, amongst respondents who've taken some kind of action due to medical cost, nearly a quarter cut pills in half, skipped doses of medicine, or failed to fill a prescription.² LD 2175 would ensure FQHCs are more equipped to provide necessary pharmacy services to patients, particularly those that are rural and/or low-income, by enabling them to develop or expand in-house pharmacy services and addressing workforce issues related to pharmacy operations.

As many rural Mainers are forced to drive hours to pick up their prescriptions at the closest pharmacy or struggle to afford their prescription drugs, the time for this funding is now. It is of the utmost importance that we provide support to FQHCs who are on the forefront of serving countless Mainers across the state. It is for these reasons that I urge you to support LD 2175.

Thank you.

¹ <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UnXtH7WPvJEGGuPxZDdv4Qi5yKiaUJ0o/view>

² https://drive.google.com/file/d/1shTcNe7NjUoU7g1ZKY63-v_tekl1L9-/view