

### **Testimony of Kerri Ann Vacher—LD 2231**

Personal Address: 186 Congress Street, Belfast

Business Address: 8 Jesse Robbins Road, Belfast

drkerrivachernd@gmail.com

207-322-8922

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the committee, I am Dr. Kerri Vacher. I am a family nurse practitioner and naturopathic doctor. I work for myself in a small primary care office. I am also one of the founding members of The Healing Garden Maine, a Belfast-based educational non-profit dedicated to creating greater access to holistic wellness information and tools. I am here to speak in favor of LD 2231.

I am a resident of Belfast in Waldo County and a 2017 graduate of the University of Southern Maine. I am also mother to a 19 yo who currently attends the University of Maine in Orono. I am a firm believer in access to affordable educational resources.

I went back to school to be a nurse practitioner after several years running my own business as a naturopathic doctor here in Maine. I wanted to be able to serve my whole community and not just the few who could afford to see me out of pocket. I made a personal and financial sacrifice to go back to school for a nursing degree so that I could bill insurance and serve my full community. I invested my heart, soul and lots of financial resources to be able to better serve my community. When I went back to school in 2014, I personally relied on the resources of the Hutchinson Center to allow me to complete some of my nursing course work close to home. I was able to utilize the high end technology to attend classes virtually and was so grateful to be able to complete some of my requirements locally.

We need this resource more than ever right now. The Healing Garden Maine non-profit is an active organization who utilized the high tech facilities that the Hutchinson Center had to offer. We ran several large events bringing affordable, donations based wellness education to our community. We were scheduled to run an event at the Hutchinson Center in November 2023 which ended up getting rescheduled and moved to a much smaller venue when the center closed suddenly. There are no other local resources like the Hutchinson Center in our area that can serve large numbers of community members.

Around the country, group medicine is popping up and we would love to see more of this in our community. Groups of people seen together for chronic health conditions have better outcomes than people who are seen for individual patient visits. Each person brings their wealth of information and real life stories of things that work. It creates a non-hierarchical environment where you are sharing ideas rather than being dictated to about "what you should do". Together, in these groups, we inspire others to imagine and feel into what is possible by sharing stories of first hand healing. The Healing Garden needs community spaces where we can run large and small group educational, wellness programming.

The Hutchinson Center was a gift to our community from community members, like myself, who see the value of investing our resources and energy into our community. People like me who give their heart and soul to the community. The Belfast and Waldo County community deserves to hold on to the resources that were given to us.