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Mercy Hospital
Northern Light Health Foundation
Northern Light Pharmacy
Sebasticook Valley Hospital

LD 156 An Act to Improve Notifications Related to Substance-exposed Infants

Testimony in Opposition January 4, 2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Lisa Harvey-McPherson RN. I am here today providing testimony on behalf of Northern Light Health and our member organizations speaking in opposition to this bill.

Northern Light Health member organizations include 10 hospitals located in southern, central, eastern and northern Maine, nursing facilities, air and ground ambulance, behavioral health, addiction treatment, pharmacy, primary and specialty care practices and a state-wide home care and hospice program. Ninety three percent of Maine's population lives in the Northern Light Health service area. Northern Light Health is also proud to be one of Maine's largest employers with more than 10,000 employees statewide.

I do want to begin my testimony with our understanding and agreement that laws and rules must provide a level of specificity to allow for consistent interpretation and application of the law. It is our understanding that the intent of this bill is to amend the statute and then provide clarification and guidance on notifications in revised rules to achieve this goal. Unfortunately, the department did not engage stakeholders regarding their concerns in advance of submitting legislation. We would have advised the department to establish a stakeholder group of healthcare professionals subject to the notification requirements.

In addition to process, we also oppose language in the bill to remove the following sections of law:

- A. This section, and any notification made pursuant to this section, may not be construed to establish a definition of "abuse" or "neglect."
- B. This section, and any notification made pursuant to this section, may not be construed to require prosecution for any illegal action, including, but not limited to, the act of exposing a fetus to drugs or other substances.

This language is important to protect the rights of pregnant women. Without this language in statute Maine could become like other states where women are jailed, prosecuted or have their children removed at birth simply because of what happened during pregnancy.

We strongly urge the committee to strike the language of this bill and amend it to direct the department to establish a stakeholder group regarding notifications related to substance-exposed infants.

Thank you.