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Testimony of Representative Anne Graham sponsoring

LD 480, An Act to Support a Healthy Weight by Providing MaineCare Coverage for Certain Weight Loss Medications

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Good afternoon, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and my esteemed colleagues of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. I am Anne Graham and I represent House District 105, which includes North Yarmouth and part of Gray. I am here today to present **LD 480, An Act to Support a Healthy Weight by Providing MaineCare Coverage for Certain Weight Loss Medications.**

I have learned a lot since I submitted this bill from obesity treatment experts in Maine. They have helped me understand that obesity is an illness, full stop. It is not a moral failing. It is not about lacking ability or willpower to diet and exercise. It is a disease that should be treated as such.

Medicine is constantly evolving. It wasn't that long ago that we didn't believe that depression and anxiety were mental illnesses, or that substance abuse disorder or alcohol abuse disorder was a disease. We now have treatments to help people with these illnesses. It is time we recognize that obesity is a treatable illness and utilize the tools that are proven to treat it. Treatments include nutrition therapy, exercise and anti-obesity medications. You will hear testimony from obesity specialists about these proven methods that help improve health and prevent disease.

Obesity is a very real and pervasive disease in the United States. According to the CDC, one in five children and two in five adults are obese. This is a significant problem because children with obesity are more likely to have numerous health conditions. These include high blood pressure and type II diabetes. Children with obesity are also more likely to have obesity as adults. Adults with obesity have a higher risk of developing many diseases. These include heart disease, type II diabetes and some types of cancer. Obesity costs the US healthcare system almost \$173 billion a year.

So, why is this bill important to me? A little over a year ago, I had my annual physical with my primary care physician, and I shared with her that I wanted to consider trying a weight loss medication. I discussed how putting on my socks and shoes had become somewhat difficult, and my ankles, knees and hips were bothering me. I had been avoiding stairs, opting to take the elevator.

She found that I had a borderline hemoglobin A1C, which indicates a high glucose level. Fortunately, my lipid profile had been consistently normal. I ate a healthy diet, though I can admit that I enjoyed some wine in the evening. What really concerned me, though, was that I wasn't excited to walk my dog, George, anymore.

After consulting with my physician, we agreed that I would try weight loss medication. Since then, I have lost nearly 35lbs. I can put my socks and shoes on without a problem, I am eating smaller portions and drinking less wine, and best of all, George and I are enjoying many more walks together.

Being overweight or obese is an equal opportunity illness that affects millions of Americans. I contend that those with lower income levels likely struggle more to access healthy and nutritious foods because those often cost more than a highly processed option, and the ability to regularly exercise can be limited. Obesity is a multifaceted disease, and I believe that everyone should have access to treatments for obesity, including weight loss medications.

By including weight loss medications in MaineCare coverage, we will broaden access to a medication that can prevent type II diabetes, heart disease and certain cancers by helping people achieve a healthy weight.

I hope you will consider the merits of this bill, and vote to give individuals who struggle with obesity a tool to live healthier lives.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have, but I may need to defer to the experts whose testimony will follow mine.