

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, esteemed members of the committee, my name is Christina Theriault. I am a nurse practitioner at Maine Family Planning, and I live in Fort Kent. I'm here today to urge you to support LD 143: An Act to Improve Women's Health and Economic Security by Funding Family Planning Services because rural Mainers deserve access to healthcare.

This bill would provide funding to ensure Mainers have access to a broad range of essential health services, including gender-affirming care.

I want to paint you a picture of the landscape of access to this care. In 2024, Maine Family Planning provided 1838 gender-affirming care appointments, serving 910 gender-affirming care patients across the State. 159 of those patients lived in Aroostook County. I am the **only** gender-affirming care provider in Aroostook County

I am proud to provide this care, because I know it is lifesaving. I am proud to provide this care in The County, because I know that queer & trans people live in rural areas, too, and they deserve the same access to basic health services. As gender-affirming care providers at Maine Family Planning, we are experts in the care we provide. Without us, patients may be forced to see providers who are not specialized in this care.

But trans healthcare isn't limited to gender-affirming care. Our trans patients need access to compassionate, expert primary care as well. My Maine Family Planning colleagues in Presque Isle and Houlton are proud to provide primary care – because access is sorely limited in The County. When I refer my trans patients to my colleagues at these health centers, I know they are going to be treated with respect, safety, and dignity. I can't say that for every primary care provider in our area.

Threats to family planning funding mean threats to a basic lifeline for trans people in Aroostook County, and other rural parts of the state. A decade of flat funding from the state legislature has left our health centers financially hamstrung. Additionally, the federal administration has made it clear that they have gender-affirming care in their crosshairs. Currently, I have several military patients who fear that their insurance is going to forbid them from accessing gender affirming care. At Maine Family Planning, we are committed to providing care to all people, regardless of their insurance coverage status or ability to pay.

It is the responsibility of the legislature to protect the health of its citizens. The funds are urgently needed to protect access to healthcare, especially for rural & low-income Mainers. Last year, 47% of our patients across all services qualified for some version of MaineCare, whether that was full or limited coverage. Without additional funding, access

to essential, lifesaving health services for people across Maine will be in jeopardy. We need the legislature to prioritize access to health care & invest in our rural communities.

Thank you for your time. I welcome any questions from the committee.

Christina Theriault, NP