

Nicole Hart, South Portland

RE: LD865, An Act to Require MaineCare to Reimburse for Lactation Services in the Homes of Eligible Persons

Good afternoon Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and members of the Committee of Health and Human Services.

My name is Nicole Hart. I am an International Board Certified Lactation Consultant (IBCLC). I work at Maine General in Augusta, as well as in private practice. I am here to support LD865, An Act to Require MaineCare to Reimburse for Lactation Services in the Homes of Eligible Persons.

At Maine General, we provide both inpatient and outpatient lactation services to families in Kennebec County and beyond. However, the demand for care far exceeds our capacity. The number of patients requiring lactation support is growing, and the acuity of their needs is increasing. Many of the families we see face complex breastfeeding challenges--slow weight gain, painful nursing, and premature babies, to name a few. These cases require ongoing, coordinated clinical care--something that our hospital team, who also supports inpatient new moms and babies, is just not able to provide. We rely on IBCLC's in the community to fill this gap. Without MaineCare coverage for private practice lactation consultants however, many families cannot access this necessary support. Without sufficient clinical lactation services, these families may experience difficulties that impact their health and the health of their babies.

We know that early breastfeeding support can have long-term benefits for both mother and child, but many families in Maine lack access to necessary care due to financial barriers. As a private practice IBCLC, I see firsthand the gap between what hospital teams can provide and the ongoing, specialized support many families need.

Breastfeeding has well-documented benefits, such as lowering the risk of infections, improving brain development, and fostering bonding between parents and babies. Breastfeeding also lowers future health care costs. Families receiving MaineCare deserve access to these benefits through excellent, accessible clinical care. Without reimbursement for IBCLCs, many of these families are left without the help they need, leading to struggles with breastfeeding or early undesired weaning that could have been prevented or alleviated with proper support.

LD865 would allow us to better serve MaineCare families by providing the necessary coverage for IBCLC care. Ensuring access to clinical lactation care helps reduce health disparities, improves outcomes for both mothers and babies, and supports the long-term health of our communities.

I urge you to support this bill and ensure all families in Maine have access to the lactation care they need. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Nicole Hart, IBCLC, MPP