



LD 917 An Act Regarding Charges to Uninsured Patients for COVID-19 Vaccines
Testimony in Support
March 20, 2025

Senator Bailey, Representative Gramlich and members of the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Committee, my name is Lisa Harvey-McPherson RN. I am speaking today in support of this bill on behalf of Northern Light Health and our member organizations. 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.

In 2021 the legislature passed LD 1 An Act To Establish the COVID-19 Patient Bill of Rights and To Amend the Governor's Emergency Powers. In negotiating this bill agreement was reached to prohibit charges for COVID-19 vaccination for uninsured patients. The expectation was that the federal government would provide COVID-19 vaccine to states as they do other vaccines, like the flu vaccine. States then distribute the vaccines for public health administration. This is what happened for the first few years when the COVID-19 vaccine became available. On September 3, 2024 the Federal Bridge program that covered the cost of COVID vaccinations for uninsured patients ended. State law in Maine prohibits pharmacies or healthcare providers from charging the patient for expenses related to COVID vaccination.

Both the Maine Adult and Pediatric Immunization Programs as well as Maine Public Health Departments can provide COVID vaccines to uninsured patients without retail pharmacies and non-participating health centers incurring the cost. It is our understanding that the state has a very limited number of COVID-19 vaccine doses for this purpose. The reality is without federal distribution of the vaccine, clinicians and pharmacists providing the vaccine must purchase the vaccine to administer to patients or to the public. For Northern Light Health the vaccine costs approximately \$98 per dose.

Patients with our primary care clinicians receive the vaccine at the care location and our charity care policies apply. For the public access to the vaccine at our pharmacy locations in Bangor, Brewer, Waterville and Ellsworth. At these locations we bill for the vaccine and administration to private insurers, individuals can also choose to pay privately. But if the individual is uninsured, we do not provide the vaccine as the law prohibits our ability to charge them for this service.

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Home Care & Hospice
Inland Hospital
Maine Coast Hospital
Mayo Hospital
Mercy Hospital
Northern Light Health Foundation
Northern Light Pharmacy
Sebasticook Valley Hospital

The bill before you today reflects the reality that we must purchase COVID-19 vaccine like any other medication and allows us to bill uninured patients for the vaccine and associated administration. Northern Light Health estimates that we would charge someone paying without insurance approximately \$117 for this service.

We ask that you support this important legislation, thank you.