



**Testimony of Maine Public Health Association in Support of:
LD 650: An Act to Support Municipal Public Health**

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
Room 209, Cross Building
Monday, March 24, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Rebecca Boulos. I am a resident of South Portland and executive director of Maine Public Health Association. MPHA is in support of LD 650: "An Act to Support Municipal Public Health."

MPHA is the state's oldest, largest, and most diverse association for public health professionals. We represent more than 850 individuals and 70 organizational members across the state, and our mission is to advance the health of all people and places in Maine.

MPHA has been a longstanding partner in strengthening Maine's public health infrastructure, working with Maine CDC and other stakeholders on these efforts. We co-convened the State Public Health System Assessment in 2020/2021 and our Public Health Infrastructure Member Section published a website about Maine's governmental public health system.¹

State statute requires every municipality in Maine to designate a Local Health Officer (LHO). The LHO's responsibilities, defined by statute, include responding to and reporting communicable diseases, managing pests that can transmit disease, like rats and bats, and responding to landlord/tenant and some housing health issues (e.g., mold). Towns and cities also have the option to adopt a local Board of Health, a volunteer body that advises the LHO. If towns adopt a local Board of Health, they are not required to use the state's language; however, it is a common reference for the few towns that do have a Board of Health.

The state statute outlining the scope of work and composition of local boards of health was written in 1885. LD 650 would update the statutory language, recognizing that the public health challenges that Maine communities face today – addiction, industrial environmental pollution, gun violence, youth mental health, housing – are different than they were 140 years ago. For example, the recent PFAS spill in Brunswick would have been beyond the scope of a local Board of Health to advise on, had the municipality adopted the state's language. The same goes for efforts to make towns more climate resilient, respond to community mental health, or air quality issues. Membership requirements for a local Board of Health are also outdated and limit participation from local residents who want to support community health.

LD 650 would provide municipalities that adopt a local Board of Health using the state's language with a more robust and community-oriented advisory body for their LHO.

We support the proposed language changes to the bill and believe LD 650 is supportive of public and environmental health. We respectfully request the committee vote LD 650 "Ought to Pass." Thank you for considering our testimony.

¹ See our website here: <https://www.mainepublichealth.org> (Public Health System Storymap is under "Publications")

Testimony of:
Alliance of Maine Health Professionals for Climate Action
Children's Oral Health Network of Maine
Defend Our Health
Maine Chapter – American Academy of Pediatrics
Maine Children's Alliance
Maine Conservation Voters
Maine Medical Association
Maine Organic Farmers and Gardeners Association
Maine Osteopathic Association
Maine Public Health Association
passivhausMAINE
Physicians for Social Responsibility Maine

In Support of:
LD 650: An Act to Support Municipal Public Health

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
Room 209, Cross Building
Monday, March 24, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. On behalf of 12 public and environmental health organizations, we write in support of LD 650: "An Act to Support Municipal Public Health."

State statute requires every municipality in Maine to designate a Local Health Officer (LHO). The LHO's responsibilities, defined by statute, include responding to and reporting communicable diseases, managing pests that can transmit disease, like rats and bats, and responding to landlord/tenant and some housing health issues (e.g., mold). Towns and cities also have the option to adopt a local Board of Health, a volunteer body that advises the LHO. If towns adopt a local Board of Health, they are not required to use the state's language; however, it is a common reference for the few towns that do have a Board of Health.

The state statute outlining the scope of work and composition of local boards of health was written in 1885. LD 650 would update the statutory language, recognizing that the public health challenges that Maine communities face today – addiction, industrial environmental pollution, gun violence, social isolation, housing – are different than they were 140 years ago. For example, the recent PFAS spill in Brunswick would have been beyond the scope of a local Board of Health to advise on, had the municipality adopted the state's language. The same goes for climate resiliency, housing, and community mental health initiatives.

Membership requirements for a local Board of Health are also outdated and limit participation from local residents who want to support community health. Currently, statutory language restricts participation to "3 members besides the local health officer, one of whom shall be a physician if available in the community, and one a woman." We support expanding the membership size from a maximum of 3, to a minimum of 3 and a maximum of 7 members, and expanding eligibility criteria to include other health professionals and clearer language about representing the community served.

LD 650 would provide municipalities that choose to adopt a local Board of Health using the state's language with a more robust and community-oriented advisory body for their LHO.

We support the proposed language changes to the bill and believe LD 650 is supportive of public and environmental health. We respectfully request the committee to please vote LD 650 "Ought to Pass." Thank you for considering our testimony.



Maine Public Health Association

LD 650: An Act to Support Municipal Public Health

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
Room 209, Cross Building
Monday, March 24, 2025

Dear Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services,

State statute requires every municipality in Maine to designate a Local Health Officer (LHO). The LHO's responsibilities, defined by statute, include responding to and reporting communicable diseases, managing pests that can transmit disease, like rats and bats, and responding to landlord/tenant and some housing health issues (e.g., mold). Towns and cities also have the option to adopt a local Board of Health, a volunteer body that advises the LHO.

The state statute outlining the scope of work and composition of local boards of health was written in 1885. The public health challenges that Maine communities face today – addiction, industrial environmental pollution, gun violence, social isolation, housing – are different than they were 140 years ago. Membership requirements for a local Board of Health are also outdated and limit participation from local residents who want to support community health.

We urge you to support LD 650, “An Act to Support Municipal Public Health,” which would revise the state statute so that if municipalities choose to adopt a local Board of Health, they have updated and relevant language to reference. That includes expanding the membership size and eligibility, as well as the scope of public health issues the advisory group can work on so that volunteers can better serve the needs of their local community. Thank you.

Sincerely,
Zachariah Croll, MPH
Portland

Hannah Siladi, MPH
Portland

Jay McCreight, MSED
Clinical Counseling
Harpwell

Sarah Fisher, MPH, CLC
Orrs Island

Katherine Bourne, MPH
Saint George

Ellen Thorne, MPH
Rumford

David Jolly, DrPH
Maine AllCare
Penobscot

Jayne Boulos, PsyD
Cape Elizabeth

Deborah Deatrick, MPH
Cumberland

Paul Kuehnert, DNP, RN, CPH, FAAN
Hallowell

Lauren Rolfe, RN
Milbridge

Roby J, MPH
Trenton

Christine Lyman, MSW (health policy)
Midcoast Public Health Council Steering
Committee
Brunswick

Paula Nersesian, PhD, MPH, RN
Wayne

Natalie Truesdell, MPH, MBA
Yarmouth

Roy Gibson Parrish, MD
Yarmouth

Gro Flatebo
Yarmouth Covid Task Force
Yarmouth

Sharon McDonnell, BSN, MD, MPH
Yarmouth Public Health Task Force
Yarmouth

Margaret Downing
Yarmouth Housing Collaborative
Yarmouth

Andrew Coburn, PhD
Emeritus Professor
University of Southern Maine
Yarmouth