



Testimony of Rita Furlow  
Maine Children's Alliance  
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services  
LD 896  
An Act to Provide Young Children Stable Access to Health Care  
March 25, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Ingwersen and Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Rita Furlow. I am the Senior Policy Analyst at the Maine Children's Alliance. I am providing testimony in support of LD 896, *An Act to Provide Young Children Stable Access to Health Care*. The Maine Children's Alliance is a statewide non-partisan, non-profit research and advocacy organization whose mission is to promote sound public policies to improve the lives of children, youth, and families in Maine.

We know that the foundations of lifelong health are established in the early years. If we wish to improve health outcomes and reduce chronic disease in Maine, we need to strengthen the foundations of health in the prenatal and early childhood periods. During these years, children's brains are rapidly developing. The environment and experiences of early childhood help to form the foundations for health, learning, and behavior for the rest of a child's life.

Nearly half of all Maine children (133,431) receive health coverage through Medicaid/MaineCare, which is jointly financed by federal and state governments<sup>1</sup>. Because eligibility for MaineCare is tied to family income, and many Maine families can experience income fluctuations because of seasonal or overtime work, this can result in children "churning" off and on the program. For these children, frequent Medicaid on-and-off experiences can result in gaps in health care coverage and delays in accessing essential services.

LD 896 would help to ensure that children in the Maine do not lose their healthcare coverage during the crucial developmental phase of birth through age five. The American Academy of Pediatrics emphasizes the importance of regular pediatric visits, recommending that children see a doctor at least 14 times before the age of six.<sup>2</sup> During these visits, children receive vaccinations, speech, hearing, and vision tests, as well as other crucial health screenings. Providing continuous, multi-year coverage can help to ensure that children receive the preventative health care they need to get off to a healthy start in life.

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<sup>1</sup> Children with MaineCare by age group and county. The Annie E. Casey Foundation, KIDS COUNT Data Center, retrieved from: <https://datacenter.aecf.org/data/tables/7323-children-with-mainecare-by-age-group-and-county?loc=21&loc=2#detailed/2/any/false/2545,1095,2048,574,1729,37,871,870,573,869/8254,3540,3542/14390,14391>

<sup>2</sup> AAP Schedule of Well-Child Care visits. Retrieved from: [https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/health-management/Pages/Well-Child-Care-A-Check-Up-for-Success.aspx?\\_gl=1\\*1kzp2oh\\*\\_ga\\*MTg4NjM2OTI0NS4xNzQyOTE5OTQy\\*\\_ga\\_FD9D3XZVQQ\\*MTc0MjkxOTk0Mi4xLjEuMTc0MjkxMDI2NC4wLjA1uMA..](https://www.healthychildren.org/English/family-life/health-management/Pages/Well-Child-Care-A-Check-Up-for-Success.aspx?_gl=1*1kzp2oh*_ga*MTg4NjM2OTI0NS4xNzQyOTE5OTQy*_ga_FD9D3XZVQQ*MTc0MjkxOTk0Mi4xLjEuMTc0MjkxMDI2NC4wLjA1uMA..)

Young children with specialized health care needs would particularly benefit from continuous coverage through age six. Children with disabilities and developmental delays often have additional and highly specialized health care needs. Children with health care conditions such as diabetes, asthma, or other chronic conditions would also significantly benefit from having uninterrupted health care.

Other states have been leading the way in this policy change to support children's health. We urge you to support LD 896 as a policy that will benefit Maine children, their parents, and Maine's future.

Thank you for your attention and consideration.