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*Testimony of Rep. Kristen Cloutier presenting*

## **LD 1079, An Act to Provide Comprehensive Perimenopause and Menopause Education**

*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services*

Good afternoon Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Kristen Cloutier, and I represent House District 94, which includes part of my hometown of Lewiston. I am pleased to sponsor **LD 1079, An Act to Provide Comprehensive Perimenopause and Menopause Education**.

Menopause is a universal experience for all who menstruate, yet education surrounding this critical health transition remains severely limited. We often hear about the most common menopause symptoms like hot flashes or mood swings. For me, they have also included difficulty concentrating and phantom smells (a particularly fun one). Those experiencing perimenopause or menopause often only learn of these symptoms and find solace from each other. The reality of this transition period however, is that there can be serious health consequences. It is not widely known that when estrogen levels decrease, there is an increased risk for heart disease, cognitive changes and osteoporosis. This knowledge gap has left generations without the information they need to navigate this significant life change effectively and with confidence.

According to data collected by AARP, 80% of graduating internal medicine residents did not feel competent to discuss or treat menopause. Only 20% of OB/GYN residencies offer menopause training and half of all U.S. OB/GYN residencies thought they needed more education on menopause medicine. Additionally, it is estimated that 85% of perimenopausal and menopausal people experience a wide array of symptoms that clinically impact their quality of life. Sixty percent seek clinical help, while 75% of women subsequently go untreated.<sup>1</sup>

LD 1079 directs the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to partner with healthcare providers, including obstetricians, gynecologists, primary care physicians, community-based health programs and hospitals to develop comprehensive educational materials about perimenopause and menopause. These resources will address symptoms, physical and emotional changes, treatment options and long-term health considerations associated with these transitions.

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.cuyunamed.org/knowledge-hub/addressing-the-knowledge-gap-menopause/#:~:text=According%20to%20AARP%2C%2080%25%20of,of%20women%20correctly%20define%20menopause.>

When we educate people about perimenopause and menopause, we empower them with knowledge that reduces anxiety and builds confidence. Many individuals, including myself, report feeling blindsided by symptoms they didn't recognize or understand, often suffering in silence for years before seeking help. By normalizing conversations about menopause and providing accurate information, we can help ensure that Mainers approach this transition with preparedness rather than fear or confusion.

Everyone deserves to understand the changes their bodies will experience and to have resources that support their health throughout all life stages. Knowledge and a positive outlook are crucial tools for managing the physical, emotional and cognitive changes related to perimenopause and menopause.

Thank you for your time and attention. I would be happy to answer any questions.