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Testimony in support as amended:

LD 217, "An Act to Require Schools to Provide Access to Free Condoms for Students in Grades to 12 in the School Nurse's Office"

Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

April 14th, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Laura Harper, I live in Hallowell and I'm a Senior Associate at Moose Ridge Associates. I'm here today to provide testimony on behalf of my client, Maine Family Planning, in support, with an amendment, for LD 217, "An Act to Require Schools to Provide Access to Free Condoms for Students in Grades 9 to 12 in the School Nurse's Office."

Maine Family Planning provides comprehensive sexual and reproductive health care to teens and adults at 19 locations statewide. Our mission is to ensure that all people have access to high-quality, culturally relevant and affordable sexual and reproductive health care services, comprehensive sexual health education, and the right to control their sexual and reproductive lives.

We are grateful for Representative Dodge's leadership in introducing this important legislation. All Maine students deserve equitable access to resources and tools to protect their health, and public schools serve every area, no matter how rural. It makes sense that condoms be available in the school environment. LD 217 is an opportunity to put safe & simple tools in the hands of Maine teens, empowering them to make healthy decisions.

With that in mind, we urge the committee to support amending the bill to say that condoms can be accessed in the school nurse's office "or locations authorized by the school nurse." As you are well aware, not all schools have a nurse on-site at all times; by allowing the nurse to authorize other locations, teens will be better able to access condoms during school hours, regardless of whether the nurse is working that day.

This legislation is well timed as Maine is seeing increased rates of sexually transmitted infections and condoms play a critical role in curbing their spread. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Maine's chlamydia rates have doubled since 2000; syphilis rates have more than doubled since 2010 (2.5 times); gonorrhea rates have nearly quadrupled since 2010 (3.7 times). In 2022, half (49.8%) of reported cases of chlamydia, gonorrhea, and syphilis were among adolescents and young adults aged 15–24 years.¹

Furthermore, unintended pregnancy can disrupt education & limit economic opportunities for young people, with only half of teenage mothers earning a diploma by the age of 22.² Young people are a

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/sti-statistics/media/pdfs/2024/11/2022-STI-Surveillance-Report-PDF.pdf>

² <https://youth.gov/youth-topics/expectant-parenting-young-families/education-employment>

vulnerable population who need tools and meaningful access to be in control of their health. LD 217 offers an important tool in the tool box for reducing teen pregnancy and STI transmission. Indeed, we must do everything we can to support Maine teens in practicing safe-sex.

Maine Family Planning urges you to vote "ought to pass as amended" on this important piece of legislation. Thank you for your time today and I'm happy to try and answer any questions.