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Testimony of Rep. Sam Zager presenting

**LD 1497, An Act to Amend the Laws Governing Primary Care
Reporting by the Maine Quality Forum and to Establish the
Primary Care Advisory Council**

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services

Good afternoon, Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson, and esteemed members of the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Committee. I am Sam Zager and I represent part of Portland. I am here today to present, **LD 1497, An Act to Amend the Laws Governing Primary Care Reporting by the Maine Quality Forum and to Establish the Primary Care Advisory Council**

Thank you for hearing this bill. The problem this measure seeks to address is that gaining access to primary care is far too hard. Establishing care with a provider, getting an appointment, seeing a consistent primary care provider (PCP) all are increasingly difficult. Anecdotally, we know that's true, and Mainers are noticing: "When Fred Kimball moved to Raymond last June, he never imagined that it would take so long and so much effort to find a new primary care physician...it was not as simple as [it used to be]...for about three months, he said, searching for a new PCP became the retiree's full-time job."¹

It's not only a frustration, but it matters for quantifiable health outcomes. Consider this finding in a reputable study: "Every 10 additional primary care physicians per 100,000 population was associated with a 51.5-day increase in life expectancy."² That's a lot of family events and holidays, time with friends, and workdays. And think of the *quality of life* that underlies it too.

The National Academy of Science, Engineering and Mathematics (NASSEM) published a 428-page report calling attention to the issue, and said that primary care is *foundational* to a high-

¹ Caruso Kendra, "Shortage of Primary Care Doctors in Maine has Patients Struggling, hospitals and providers scrambling," *Sun Journal*, 4 Aug 2024. <https://www.sunjournal.com/2024/08/04/just-awful-shortage-of-primary-care-doctors-in-maine-has-patients-struggling-hospitals-and-providers-scrambling/>

² A higher concentration of specialists also was found to improve life expectancy, but primary care mattered 2.5 times more in this study. Basu, Phillips et al. "Association of Primary Care Physician Supply with Population Mortality in the United States, 2000-2015" *JAMA Internal Medicine*. 2019 Apr 1; 179(4): 506-514. <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/30776056/>

functioning health system.³ Of *all* the things in the fields of science, engineering and mathematics, they devoted resources to the issue before you today.

LD 1497 proposes to address the problem in two ways, incrementally improving things for Mainers regarding primary care access:

First, by improving awareness of the situation. The 129th Legislature passed LD 1353, which called for the Maine Quality Forum to quantify primary care investment – i.e. what percent of all healthcare spending in Maine is for primary care? High quality health systems invest 12-15% and Maine's remains stationary around 9-10% ever since the legislation passed in 2019. That's essentially the only variable we're monitoring statewide. Since the situation is getting worse for Fred in Raymond and so many other Mainers, there must be *other* variables that can help us understand the dimensions and distribution of the problem. Maine Quality Forum's counterparts in other states have begun looking at other variables, like the ones pertaining to section two of this bill (page 1, lines 10-17). It's like a dashboard for the primary care system in Maine.

Second, by facilitating proposals to improve the system, creating a Primary Care Council to make use of that improved awareness and offering Maine-based recommendations to improve the system.

Other states like Texas, Virginia, and Massachusetts are utilizing this two-prong approach--dashboards and stakeholder collaboratives--to improve their primary care systems. It's time Maine did too.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration. I'd be happy to answer questions.

³ <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/25983/implementing-high-quality-primary-care-rebuilding-the-foundation-of-health>