



Testimony of Katie Rutherford
In Support of LD 1687 – *An Act to Clarify and Increase Access to HIV Prevention Medications*
Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services
April 29, 2025

Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson and Honorable Members of the Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services, my name is Katie Rutherford, and I am the Executive Director of Frannie Peabody Center, Maine's only remaining community-based HIV/AIDS services organization. We serve over 400 individuals living with HIV in Maine and provide over 2,000 free rapid HIV tests annually throughout the state, in addition to linkage to care and prevention navigation.

In 2021, HCIFS heard from providers and community members that made the overwhelming case for expanded access to HIV PrEP and PEP at pharmacies, at a time when our communities were grappling with another epidemic and depending on pharmacists as key healthcare access points. The Maine Board of Pharmacy has since established and adopted protocols required by the law, and now two key components – pharmacy reimbursement for services and coverage for medications - are critical to finally put this legislation to work.

In 2022 I received a call on a Friday afternoon from someone who had discovered they had been exposed to HIV and was running out of the required 72-hour window to initiate post-exposure prophylaxis. They had just been sent away from an urgent care clinic that told them their policy prohibited prescribing PEP. I let them know there must have been a mistake – I knew this urgent care clinic offered walk-in STI testing and had recently started advertising for primary care, so I told the individual perhaps front desk staff misheard them or wasn't aware of what PEP was. They were just blocks away from a pharmacy, and without a car, I let them know they were exactly where they needed to be and advised they go back in and try to speak with someone else. Minutes later, this time with greater panic and fear, they let me know they had again been turned away. Hours of scrambling to reach partner providers that were available at the last minute and pulling our only full-time prevention staff member away from a test event, we were able to guide this individual to a prescriber, and they accessed PEP with full insurance coverage at the pharmacy that had been around the corner from where they began. Had just a few more hours gone by, I may have been talking to that individual about HIV case management.

Navigating PrEP and PEP can be challenging, and it is further complicated by stigma, medication costs and gaps in provider access. LD 1687 sets the 2021 law into motion by operationalizing the adopted protocols and ensuring reimbursement for pharmacists. It will largely expand critical HIV prevention access points and ensure coverage advancing medications including long-acting injectables. These are the pathways we need to support the health and wellbeing of our communities.

I urge you to review the extensive list of broad support for this bill including medical providers, Maine medical associations, Maine pharmacists, national advocacy groups, American Pharmacists Association, and members of the community hoping to finally see this policy in action and willing to put it to work in Maine.

Please votes yes on LD 1687 and help expand access to HIV prevention across our state. Thank you for your leadership on this critical issue.

Testimony of Community Organizations, Providers and Community Members

LD 1687 – Ought to Pass

Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services

April 29, 2025

Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson and Honorable Members of the Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services: we, the undersigned, are community organizations, public health advocates, constituents, and individuals that are, work with, care for, love, and/or support Mainers living with or at elevated risk to contract HIV. We write to express our strong support for LD 1687, *An Act to Clarify and Increase Access to HIV Prevention Medications*. This bill builds on its previous version by addressing reimbursement for pharmacies and medication coverage that expands access to HIV prevention at pharmacies.

In 2021, Maine helped lead a nationwide effort as just the third state in the country to pass legislation that enabled people to access HIV pre- and post-exposure prophylaxis directly from a pharmacist. With protocols now officially adopted by the Maine Board of Pharmacy, we must address key provisions in the statute to ensure effective implementation:

- **Reimbursement** – LD 1687 ensures pharmacists are recognized as providers and reimbursed at a rate comparable to physicians for equivalent services required by Maine Board of Pharmacy protocols. This model is consistent with other states passing similar legislation.
- **Medication Coverage** – scientific advancements of HIV medications are emerging rapidly. Long-acting injectable medications are a game changer in the ability to stop HIV transmission and a medication that protects from infection with just one injection over a 6-month period is on the cusp of entering the market. LD 1687 ensures coverage for these medications of longer duration so people can access the strongest prevention methods available.

This policy is not just smart public health—it's urgently needed. At the same time that we face rising HIV cases amidst an active HIV outbreak in Bangor, federal funding for HIV prevention is under threat. Programs funded through HRSA, HUD, and the CDC are facing proposed cuts that would have catastrophic impacts on our state's ability to prevent new infections. In this environment, we must act boldly at the state level to preserve access to proven, cost-effective prevention strategies. Every HIV infection prevented saves over \$500,000 in lifetime medical costs.¹

We know that PrEP and PEP work. We know they save lives. We know they are key to ending the HIV epidemic. But they only work if people can get them. This bill ensures they can.

We urge you to support LD 1687 and help expand access to HIV prevention across our state. Thank you for your leadership on this critical issue.

Signed, [cont.]

1. Bingham A, Shrestha RK, Khurana N, Jacobson EU, Farnham PG. Estimated Lifetime HIV-Related Medical Costs in the United States. *Sex Transm Dis*. 2021 Apr 1;48(4):299-304. doi: 10.1097/OLQ.0000000000001366. PMID: 33492100.

American Pharmacists Association
Equality Community Center
EqualityMaine
Frannie Peabody Center
GLBTQ Legal Advocates & Defenders
Greater Portland Health
HIV + Hepatitis Policy Institute
Mabel Wadsworth Center
Maine Access Immigrant Network
Maine Access Points
Maine Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics
Maine HIV Advisory Committee
Maine Medical Association
Maine Osteopathic Association
Maine Pharmacy Association
Maine Public Health Association
Maine Society of Health System Pharmacies
MaineTransNet
Planned Parenthood of Northern New England
PrEP4All
The Purple Iris Foundation
The Rx EACH Initiative
VOA Northern New England

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