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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Testimony of Rep. Jan Dodge introducing

**LD 1578, An Act to Require the Department of Health and Human Services to
Review Disruption to or Removal of Health Services
*Before the Health Care, Insurance and Financial Services Committee***

Good day, Chair Bailey, Chair Mathieson and esteemed colleagues of the Health Care, Insurance and Financial Services Committee. My name is Jan Dodge and I represent House District 39 – Belfast, Northport and Belmont. I am before you today to present LD 1578, An Act to Require the Department of Health and Human Services to Review Disruption to or Removal of Health Services.

Residents in my area and many people throughout the State of Maine believe the closure and impending closures of multiple birthing units in our area hospitals is creating a health emergency. I believe these reductions in service should be subject to greater scrutiny and allowable preventive actions by the Department of Health and Human Services.

Citizens believe hospitals eliminating birthing units exemplify a significant disruption to their access to needed health services! Some citizens are concerned about travel time. People in the Belfast area must now travel to Rockport. That will be fine except on warm summer days when the traffic in Camden is at its peak. Expectant moms in Houlton will now have to travel one hour north to Presque Isle or two hours south to Bangor. Waterville moms must travel to Augusta. They are lucky!!! They can use I-95!!! Mount Desert Island parents-to-be are hoping to maintain their on-island services.

Medical professionals from doctors to nurses predict some negative outcomes. Midwives and doulas are concerned that emergency hospital birthing plans are no longer in close proximity if something goes sideways – no pun intended! We are lessening access. We are creating birthing deserts by allowing the removal of services without consistent assessment and a path to prevention of the removals as well as legally binding corrective actions.

At Waldo County General Hospital, contracts were signed and promises of levels of service were made when our hospital merged with Pen Bay Medical Center under the MaineHealth umbrella. Sections of that contract referenced maintaining levels of service, though unfortunately, I expect there were no mentions of drive times or mileage parameters.

There are also negative economic effects that accompany these changes. I have heard from birthing specialists who plan to move closer to birthing units out of fear of not being able to provide appropriate care. I had one dad on the phone, in tears, who planned to leave the area to protect his wife in the birth of their fourth child. He was distraught to pull his kids out of their schools and scared he could not find a rental or affordable home in a new town. How many young families will not settle in communities that have reduced birthing access? How will we tabulate the number of young families who choose to live in not just other municipalities, but in OTHER STATES due to this situation? That is not a good option for an aging state like Maine!!

I hope LD 1578 will provide a path to help other hospitals and health care facilities preserve levels of service. Please pass LD 1578.

Thank you.