



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Testimony of Rep. Gary Friedmann in Support of

**LD 1578, An Act to Require the Department of Health and Human Services to
Review Disruption to or Removal of Health Services**

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

Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson and honorable members of the Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services, my name is Gary Friedmann and I represent House District 14, which includes Bar Harbor, Cranberry Isles, Lamoine and Mount Desert. It is my honor to testify in support of **LD 1578, An Act to Require the Department of Health and Human Services to Review Disruption to or Removal of Health Services**.

On many levels, our state is facing a crisis in health care – not the least of which is the alarming closure of rural hospitals and critical health services. Mount Desert Island was very recently shaken by two abrupt announcements.

Last August, Northern Light closed the Southwest Harbor Medical Center. Since opening in 1961, the medical center had been a critical part of the life and health of the communities on the western side of Mount Desert Island. At the time of the announcement, it served 1,600 patients.

The head of the center was informed of the closing by Northern Light – not consulted. Patients learned by word of mouth. The weekly paper published a story about the closure before patients received a letter from Northern Light. Local officials were never informed.

Two months ago, decision makers at Mount Desert Island Hospital closed the maternity unit without consulting nurses or patients. The head of the unit was not consulted or informed. Patients learned about it from Facebook. Local officials were not consulted or informed.

This bill allows the Commissioner of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to hold a public hearing to determine whether a significant disruption to or removal of a health service has occurred, and to enforce its reinstatement if the terms by which the service was originally approved have been violated.

It is unfortunate that our state's healthcare system has become so fragile that this bill is necessary. But we cannot allow decisions impacting the viability of our communities to continue to be made without local stakeholder participation and oversight by DHHS.

The future and the health of our rural communities depend on this – a change in business as usual. I urge your support for LD 1578, and am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you.