

Senator Bailey, Rep Mathieson & Members of The Committee
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Advocating for the All Maine Health Care Act: A Path to State-Based Universal Health Care

Tackling Inefficiency, Cost, and Inequity in Maine's Health Care System

Maine faces a critical juncture in its health care system, an opportunity to address inefficiency, soaring costs, and inequity through the introduction of the All Maine Health Care Act. This legislation aims to create a state-based universal health care system by combining existing health care services into a single, state-administered payer. Such reforms are essential in Maine, where the current healthcare infrastructure fails to meet the needs of its residents, leaving the majority vulnerable and underserved.

The Need for Universal Health Care in Maine

The inefficiencies in Maine's healthcare system have reached alarming levels, leading to financial instability and unequal access to essential medical services. Despite the significant advancements in medical technology and care, Maine residents continue to face barriers to affordable health care. Approximately 70% of Mainers remain at risk of bankruptcy due to one serious illness, a staggering statistic that underscores the precarious position of many families.

Take, for instance, the case of my patient grappling with diabetes who refuses to adjust their medication dosage. This decision is not rooted in ignorance but in financial despair—this individual is already paying over \$700 out-of-pocket each month for life-saving medications. Such stories are not isolated; they represent the lived realities of countless Mainers who struggle to balance the cost of care with other basic needs, including housing, food, and education.

I have served as a family physician in both a single-payer health system, the United States Air Force, and in the current chaotic patchwork of American health system that primarily benefits private insurance, pharmacy benefit managers and pharmaceutical companies. In the USAF, I spent my time focused on caring for the health needs of my active duty and retired patients and their families, and not on figuring out how to get their imaging and medications approved by some hidden outside insurer. Preventive health was easily obtained by all parties. My skills were focused not on scheduling “prior authorization” “peer-to-peer” phone calls begging for approvals from someone in a distance office being paid by an insurance company, but on making my patients

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employer-sponsored plans enjoy comprehensive coverage, while others are left to navigate limited or no access to care.

State-based universal health care would guarantee coverage for all Mainers, regardless of income, employment, or pre-existing conditions. By removing barriers to access, the All Maine Health Care Act could create a more just and equitable health care landscape.

Benefits of the All Maine Health Care Act

A state-based universal health care system offers numerous benefits that could transform Maine's healthcare landscape:

1. Financial Protection

The act would shield residents from the financial devastation of medical debt. Families would no longer face the threat of bankruptcy due to a sudden illness or accident.

2. Improved Public Health Outcomes

Universal coverage encourages preventive care, early diagnosis, and timely treatments, leading to better health outcomes across the population.

3. Administrative Efficiency

By consolidating services under a single-payer model, Maine could significantly reduce the administrative complexities and costs associated with managing multiple insurance providers.

4. Negotiation Power

A unified system allows the state to negotiate directly with pharmaceutical companies and healthcare providers, securing lower prices and improved services.

5. Economic Growth

With reduced healthcare costs, businesses and families would have more disposable income, driving economic growth and stability in the state.

Challenges and Solutions

While the benefits of state-based universal health care are clear, implementing such a system is not without challenges. Opposition may arise from private insurers, pharmaceutical companies, and those concerned about increased taxes. However, these challenges can be mitigated through transparency, public engagement, and phased implementation.

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1. Building Public Support

Educating the public about the advantages of universal health care is paramount. Town hall meetings, informational campaigns, and testimonials from individuals impacted by the current system can foster support and awareness.

2. Incremental Implementation

Introducing universal health care in phases allows for adjustments and refinements as the system evolves. This approach minimizes disruption and enhances the likelihood of success.

3. Creative Funding Mechanisms

To address concerns about taxation, the system could explore innovative funding options, such as sin taxes on tobacco and alcohol or reallocating existing healthcare funds.

A Vision for Maine's Future

The All Maine Health Care Act represents a bold step towards a brighter, healthier future for all residents. It is a call to action to prioritize the well-being of Mainers over profits and inefficiencies. By embracing universal health care, Maine can set an example for other states, proving that equitable, cost-effective, and efficient health care is not just a possibility but a necessity.

The patient with diabetes who struggles to afford their medication is but one voice among thousands crying out for change. Maine has the opportunity to answer this call, to build a health care system that values every individual and leaves no one behind. Together, we can turn the tide on inefficiency, cost, and inequity, ensuring that health care in Maine is truly universal.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Cyrus J. DeCheris MD". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the letters "Cyrus" and "DeCheris" being more prominent and connected, and "MD" written in a slightly more formal, spaced-out font at the end.