

State of Maine | 132nd Legislature
Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services
Testimony of Darcy Shargo on behalf of Maine Primary Care Association
January 27, 2024

Supporting:
LD 2151, "An Act to Improve Access to Affordable Prescription Drugs in Underserved Areas"
Sponsored by Senator Reny

Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services, I am Darcy Shargo, Chief Executive Officer at Maine Primary Care Association (MPCA).

MPCA is a membership organization representing Maine's Community Health Centers (CHCs), also known as Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs). Maine's FQHCs make up the largest independent primary care network in the state, providing high quality and affordable primary and preventive medical, behavioral, and dental health services for over 200,000 people (or 1 in 6 Mainers) at more than 100 service delivery sites around the State.

I want to begin by thanking this committee on behalf of the Community Health Centers across the state, for unanimously passing this bill in 2024 and for making it the number one priority in your report out to the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee. We appreciated the committee's bipartisan leadership on this important issue and respectfully to ask that you again show your support of LD 2151, legislation that will provide much needed resources for health centers to improve access and expand pharmacy services in Maine.

The need to increase pharmacy access in Maine is as crucial now as it was in 2024. Mainers continue to face a critical shortage of access to affordable medications, especially in rural and underserved areas served by FQHCs. A recent study by GoodRx found that 45% of Maine residents live in a pharmacy desert.¹ Additionally, Maine is seeing a dramatic decline in the number of retail pharmacies across the state due to ongoing workforce and economic challenges, with the Maine Board of Pharmacy reporting a 10% reduction over the last decade.² Unfortunately, the data on pharmacy closures doesn't factor in the short notice and temporary closures that further impacts patient access across the state, which places yet another burden on the health and wellbeing of Maine residents. As is common of health centers, the FQHCs want to build and expand pharmacy services to the communities that they serve; however existing health center revenues and resources are insufficient to support such development or expansion of current services.³

I am joined today by leaders from Maine's FQHC Network, and I know that they will be able to speak about the real-life impacts that pharmacy access issues are having for their patients in communities across the state.

¹ <https://www.goodrx.com/healthcare-access/research/many-americans-lack-convenient-access-to-pharmacies>

² <https://www.bangordailynews.com/2024/03/04/state/state-health/main-pharmacies-closures-chains-independent-stores/>

³ <https://geigergibson.publichealth.gwu.edu/community-health-centers-financial-jeopardy-without-sufficient-federal-funding>

LD 2151 would establish a grant program, overseen by the Department of Health and Human Services, to provide support for FQHCs to develop or expand their capacity to provide greater access to affordably priced drugs for their patients by increasing FQHCs' ability to deliver pharmacy services to those patients. One way to improve access is by setting up in-house pharmacy services, allowing for the added benefit of increasing overall coordination within the patient's care team. The effects of this legislation would also allow FQHCs to address workforce issues related to pharmacy operations in their local communities by hiring much needed pharmacy staff.

Maine has reached a critical point in its ability to provide patients with access to affordable, life-saving medications. It is essential to provide immediate funding support for Maine's FQHCs to develop and expand pharmacy services throughout the state.

We appreciate your consideration of our comments and thank Senator Reny and the other cosponsors for bringing this important legislation forward. Please do not hesitate to contact me directly with any follow up questions.

Sincerely,



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