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Testimony of Representative Jack Ducharme Supporting LD 2151 An Act to Improve Access to Affordable Prescription Drugs in Underserved Areas

Good afternoon, Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson, and esteemed members of the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Committee. I am Representative Jack Ducharme, and I proudly represent House District 71, the people of Madison, Norridgewock, and Cornville. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today in strong support of LD 2151, An Act to Improve Access to Affordable Prescription Drugs in Underserved Areas, a bipartisan bill that I am pleased to cosponsor.

A serious challenge has grown acute across Maine in the last few years — the loss of access to local pharmacies and affordable medications. Throughout our state, retail pharmacies are closing or reducing hours due to workforce and financial pressures. Large chains are not located in or near every community, and in many rural towns there is no longer a pharmacy at all. For many Mainers, this can mean driving long distances, waiting days for medications by mail, or simply going without.

That is why LD 2151 is so important. This bill establishes a grant program to support Federally Qualified Health Centers so they can develop or expand in-house pharmacy services and deliver affordable medications directly to their patients.

For over forty years I have been a patient of my local Federally Qualified Health Center, HealthReach Community Health Centers, and I can attest that Maine's FQHCs provide excellent primary care and are also the backbone of our rural health care safety net. But today, even when patients can see a provider at a health center, they

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may not be able to fill a prescription written for them easily. By enabling FQHCs and others to provide pharmacy services where patients already receive care, we improve access, reduce delays, and strengthen care coordination.

Importantly, this is not a new idea. This bipartisan legislation mirrors a bill that was unanimously approved by this committee in 2024 in the 131st. That bill was inserted into the 2024 Supplemental Budget and signed into law by the Governor in April of 2024. Unfortunately, before that program was rolled out, while health care agencies were waiting for the rules and process to be written, that funding was “clawed back” in early 2025 to be applied to some other “emergent need”, even as pharmacy closures continued and the underlying need only intensified.

The program is even more urgent now. HealthReach is just one FQHC that was ready to apply for the grant program in 2024 so that it could begin to put in place the mechanisms to provide pharmacy access in a part of our state that very much needs additional pharmacy access. LD 2151 is a practical, targeted solution that builds on trusted community institutions and responds directly to a growing crisis. Further, this bill requests one time funding with NO ONGOING need. Once the grant program is finished, there will be no further need for funding, unless the Legislature decides that it was successful and should be continued with new funding.

I respectfully urge the committee to vote “Ought to Pass” on LD 2151 and help ensure that access to health care in Maine truly includes access to the medications that make that care possible.

Thank you for your time and I am happy to answer any questions.

Jack Ducharme