



Testimony in support:

LD 335, "An Act to Protect Funding for Family Planning Services"

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

February 25, 2026

Senator Ingwerson, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Laura Harper, I live in Hallowell and I'm a Senior Associate at Moose Ridge Associates. I'm testifying before you today on behalf of my client, the Maine Academy of Physician Associates or MEAPA.

In 1977, MEAPA was incorporated as a nonprofit organization to represent physician associates or PAs employed within the State of Maine. The PA profession originated in the 1960's, at a time when the US was experiencing a progressive shortage of physicians, particularly in primary care. The goal was to rapidly train and deploy safe and competent clinicians, to help address physician shortages and increase access to quality healthcare. Today, UNE, Maine's only PA Program focused on rural primary care, graduates approximately 50 students per year with 70% of them remaining in Maine to practice. There are more than 1,100 PAs practicing in Maine. Per our national affiliate's 2023 Annual Salary Report, 31.4% of Maine PAs work in primary care and 34% of all Maine PAs practice in a rural location. PAs in primary care in particular are essential to expand access to care for Mainers. Many patients in remote locations rely exclusively on PAs to deliver their care where access to physician-delivered primary care ranges from reduced to nonexistent. PAs in Maine and across the country continue to fill the physician shortage gap to this day and function alongside our physician colleagues as leaders in the interdisciplinary healthcare team.

First and foremost, MEAPA stands united with our colleagues who provide life-saving sexual and reproductive health care as part of Maine's statewide family planning network. Because of our history and our training, PAs play a unique role as clinicians in helping to address access to quality and affordability during this time of crisis and turmoil in the healthcare system as a whole. We see ourselves as partners alongside physicians, nurses and all healthcare professionals when it comes to ensuring all Mainers have access to the care they need, when they need it, close to home.

Therefore, it is no surprise that we are in strong support of LD 335. This bill protects access to not only sexual and reproductive care but also primary and behavioral health services. Often family planning providers are the first and only healthcare clinicians a patient will see annually. They are on the frontlines, screening for not only cancers and STIs but also depression and intimate partner violence.

Maine Family Planning and Planned Parenthood, Maine, provide care to anyone who needs them, regardless of ability to pay and subsequently provide millions of dollars in free and discounted care each year. They are part of the backbone of Maine's healthcare system, especially in our most rural communities and they deserve our support.

Access to reproductive healthcare is critical to protect an individual's physical and mental well-being, and it is in the best interest of broader public health. LD 335 will provide much needed protection for Maine patients and ensure access can continue for the essential health care Maine's family planning providers offer. As we continue to see actions escalate nationally to penalize clinicians and erode access to all sexual and reproductive care, we urge you to take action now and support this legislation.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments and I'm happy to try and answer any questions you may have.