

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer and members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Rachel Bicknell, and I am a resident of Windham, Maine. I am here before you not as a politician or public speaker, but as a 911 dispatcher, the wife of a firefighter, and most importantly, a mother of two amazing daughters — one of whom is Annie, a baby girl who required immediate, life-saving care upon her arrival into this world. I speak in opposition to Bill LD2196.

With nearly 40 years of combined service in public safety between my husband and me, we are no strangers to hardship. As a 911 dispatcher and a firefighter, we have stood witness to tragedy. We have answered the calls no one ever wants to make and walked into the worst days of other people's lives. We understand, better than most, how fragile life can be and how quickly everything can change.

But this time, it wasn't a voice on the other end of the line.  
It wasn't a scene to respond to and then clear from.  
This time, it was our baby girl.

At 24 weeks gestation, we had the dreaded ultrasound — the one where the technician grows quiet and leaves to get a doctor. The next hours and days were mostly a blur. Words like viability, quality of life, and options suddenly filled the room. Those are the first steps.

I'm here to talk about the next steps — the logistics. A family of four relocating out of state. Facing the best and yet scariest moments of our lives without our loved ones nearby. That was our assumed reality.

Within a week of that ultrasound, we learned that Annie had a congenital heart defect — Transposition of the Great Arteries. Essentially, her heart's plumbing was reversed. Without immediate intervention, it carries a 90% mortality rate within the first month of life. She would require a cardiac procedure immediately after delivery, followed by a multi-hour open-heart surgery at just three days old — a surgery that would require surgeons to stop her strawberry-sized heart, place her on ECMO, hand-stitch her heart back together, and pray for it to restart.

I know what I was thinking — get the toll money ready. We were going to be Boston-bound... or even farther.

Then Dr. Miller, Annie's congenital heart doctor, gave us the most surprising news of all: we didn't have to go out of state. A new cardiac surgeon had just relaunched MaineHealth's pediatric cardiovascular surgery team. After more than a decade, our Annie was going to be patient number one.

After 21 days at MaineHealth's Barbara Bush Children's Hospital — following a successful arterial switch operation by Dr. Binsalamah and exceptional care from the entire PICU, NICU, and cardiac teams — Annie was sent home. A healthy baby girl with a unique story of resilience... and a really cool scar.

My husband and I are Mainers — through and through, for generations. Our support systems, our friends, our careers, and our families are all here in this beautiful state.

The care that Annie received — and that we received as a family — was exceptional.

Passing this bill would eliminate the specialized care that our tiniest Mainers desperately need.

Whatever step of the journey a family is on, MaineHealth and Barbara Bush Children's Hospital provide exceptional care — care that truly cares — close to home.

LD 2196 risks weakening the specialized pediatric services that families like mine depend on. It risks sending Maine families out of state at the most fragile moment of their lives.

Thank you.