

Testimony – March 25, 2026

Representative Mathieson and members of the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Committee:

My name is Dr. Sarah Ackerly, and I am a naturopathic doctor practicing in the Brunswick/Topsham area for the past thirty-one years. I have the unique perspective of having worked on the original bill to license naturopathic doctors in Maine. I have also served on the Board of Complementary Health Care Providers since its inception three decades ago, though I am not testifying in that capacity today.

I'd like to offer some background on the initial decision to license naturopathic doctors and the findings of the Legislative Task Force which examined naturopathic licensure and scope of practice thirty-one years ago. This task force included all major stakeholders and spent four months and many long hours reviewing the education and training of naturopathic doctors. Their goal was to determine whether to license these doctors and what scope of practice would be appropriate based on that assessment.

After a thorough and evidence-based review, the task force recommended licensing naturopathic doctors and granting prescriptive authority for all Category (*Schedule*) V Legend drugs, which include opiates and anticonvulsant medications. When this report reached the legislature, there was less understanding at that time of naturopathic medicine, and the result was a compromise on prescriptive authority in favor of a formulary of inclusion—that has remained unchanged for over 30 years. Unfortunately, as soon as that list was published, it became outdated, given the rapid pace of both botanical and pharmaceutical research.

Over the past three decades, repeated attempts have been made to update this formulary. Our profession has come before your committee to ask for your help in ensuring that patients have safe and timely access to the medications they need. Updating the formulary supports public safety and allows naturopathic doctors to practice in alignment with current standards of care—an important step in addressing Maine's rural healthcare crisis.

Let me share what this means in real life. I've had patients sent to the emergency room—at great cost to them and to already overburdened emergency departments—simply to receive an antihypertensive prescription. I've sent patients to allergists and urgent care centers, just to obtain an inhaler for their asthma. I have even had to send one patient an hour and a half from her home to receive iron infusions for her anemia. Some of those patients are here today, asking for your support.

The Board of Complementary Health Care Providers, a multidisciplinary board that includes a medical doctor, certified nurse midwife, naturopathic doctors, acupuncturists, and certified professional midwives, has done its due diligence in response to your request to modernize the naturopathic formulary. The Board consulted with the Board of Pharmacy and engaged all relevant stakeholders through a public hearing process. After careful review, the Board unanimously approved these rules.

I respectfully ask that you support these rules as written with a unanimous “ought to pass.”

Thank you for your time and continued support.

Dr. Sarah Ackerly, ND
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