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THE MAINE SENATE
130th Legislature

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Testimony in Support of LD 1
An Act To Establish the COVID-19 Patient Bill of Rights

Presented to the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services

Tuesday, February 23, 2021

Good morning, Senator Sanborn, Representative Tepler, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services. As you all know, my name is Troy Jackson and I have the honor of serving as the President of the Maine Senate and of representing northern Aroostook County in Senate District 1. I am here today to present an amended version of LD 1, "An Act To Establish the COVID-19 Patient Bill of Rights."

Eleven months ago, COVID-19 turned the world as we all know it upside down. Since last March, this deadly virus has put a tremendous toll on our physical and mental health, not to mention our economy. More than 42,000 Mainers have been infected with the virus and more than 600 of our friends and neighbors have tragically passed away.¹ However, there is some good news amid all of this sadness

Months of wearing masks and practicing social distancing has helped slow the spread of the virus here in Maine. At the same time, we now have two different COVID-19 vaccines that have been approved by the federal government and are being administered here in Maine. A third vaccine is expected to earn the FDA's emergency use approval any day now. The quicker we get Mainers vaccinated, the quicker we can get to the other side of this crisis.

LD 1, "An Act to Establish the COVID-19 Patient Bill of Rights" is the first step towards getting our state and lives back. It will ensure Mainers have access to essential care to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and protect themselves, their families, and their communities from this virus.

This bill will allow Mainers to breathe a little easier knowing that they will be able to access screening, testing and vaccinations without having to worry about costs or insurance coverage. It will bring us all closer to a world where grandparents can play with their grandkids again and where everyone can celebrate holidays, birthdays, and other important life events without having to worry about social distancing or about the safety of gathering indoors or without masks.

¹ <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/us/maine-coronavirus-cases.html>

Where you live and how much money you make should never determine whether or not you can get the care you need, especially as our nation grapples with a deadly public health crisis. Health care is a human right and it's essential to living your life freely. However, affordable health care remains out of reach for far too many people. It goes against our values and it stands in the way of getting our state and country safely on the road to recovery.

The COVID-19 Patient Bill of Rights, as amended, supports Mainers in our fight against this deadly virus in a number of ways. First, it requires that state-regulated health care plans cover COVID-19 screenings, testing and vaccinations at no cost to Maine people. It even includes a provision to protect Mainers from "facilities fees" and other unnecessary charges. This will ensure that Maine can begin the process of rebuilding our economy without having to worry about whether or not everyone has access to the resources to stay safe.

Second, the bill expands telehealth coverage to include audio-only services. The goal is to make sure all patients can get the remote care they need even if they live in an area where broadband connections are unreliable. The bill also requires insurance companies to cover telehealth services the same way they do for in-person services. Finally, it also allows health care professionals to prescribe medications for longer periods of time during a state of emergency, allowing those most vulnerable to such emergencies to limit their trips to the pharmacy.

Although uninsured Mainers should already be able to access free testing and vaccination at certain government-contracted sites, this bill provides some basic protections. It requires providers to inform consumers of any upfront charges they may be required to pay for testing, screening and vaccination services. These providers must also provide consumers with the MaineCare waiver needed to get reimbursed for these charges. It's another way to make sure cost isn't a barrier to these vital services as we battle a public health crisis.

Every person that we lose to COVID-19 is one person too many. In a small state like Maine, each loss is profound. These are our friends, family members and neighbors. We should not have to sacrifice our family members and neighbors to re-open our communities and rebuild our economies. Instead, we should create a system that ensures that everyone has access to the healthcare that they need to protect themselves and the people they love from the harm that this virus can cause. LD 1 will do just that by providing access to screening, testing, and vaccinations, enabling Mainers from all across the state, no matter their income or health insurance status, to access the resources needed to stay safe as we move into a post-COVID world.

In closing, thank you for your time and attention. Please support LD 1 to help ensure that all Mainers are protected against COVID-19 and that nobody has to worry about the cost of safety against this deadly virus.