

**Testimony of Ren Morrill, HIV Prevention Coordinator, Frannie Peabody Center
LD 1115 An Act To Improve Access to HIV Prevention Medications
Before the Joint Standing Committee on
Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services – April 8, 2021**

Madam Chair Sanborn, Madam Chair Tepler, and Members of the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Committee: My name is Ren Morrill and I am the Prevention Program Coordinator at Frannie Peabody Center, Maine's oldest and largest community-based HIV/AIDS services organization. I am here today in support of LD 1115 as it will get us one step closer to ending HIV/AIDS, an epidemic that has raged for nearly forty years.

PrEP was approved by the FDA in 2012 as a daily pill to prevent HIV infection, and is widely recognized as the tool that can end the HIV epidemic. Yet, people still face barriers to accessing PEP and PrEP whether it be cost, coverage, physical distance, or lacking a trusted provider. In my four years as the Prevention Program Coordinator, I've learned that HIV prevention is often a matter of timing. People seek services after having had significant risk of HIV infection. When faced with barriers, complicated means of access, and stigma, many clients may not see a feasible way forward. It is in the crucible of this moment where the real prevention work occurs. This legislation offers a direct, smooth, and efficient pathway to care through a trusted pharmacy provider. As someone who answers the call and counsels people at very high risk, I can say with confidence, being able to link them directly to a pharmacist for PrEP or PEP will make the difference between someone becoming infected with HIV or remaining HIV-negative.

We've seen this strategy work with lowering the barriers to HIV testing by meeting clients where they are, whenever they need the service. This bill is an extension of this low barrier approach to prevention. It would not only allow patients rapid access to PrEP and PEP, but would also ensure that they are seamlessly linked to other supportive services such as primary care. This bill puts patient needs first by supporting individuals' continued engagement in care which contributes to positive health outcomes, sustained well-being, and a pathway to ending the epidemic.

If the past year has shown us anything, it is the importance of low-barrier services in tackling public health crises. I urge you to support LD 1115 as it expands access to critical HIV prevention tools.