

**Testimony of Katie Rutherford, Executive Director, 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 Katie Rutherford and I'm the Executive Director at Frannie Peabody Center.

Like my coworker, Ren, who you have also heard from, I am one of the certified HIV testers at our agency. I remember a gentleman who came all the way down to Portland from a small remote island off the coast of Maine, just to access a confidential HIV test because he was concerned about possible exposure and didn't know where else to turn. He was also worried about possible disclosure within his small community should his test come back positive. Even though PrEP had been approved by the FDA years prior, he had never heard of it. His test was negative, I gave him as much information as I could and sent him hours back up north, knowing he would likely be at risk again. Had this legislation been in place, I could have pointed him directly to a pharmacy and linked him to trusted prevention services that could have provided long-term protection from HIV infection.

I also want to take a moment to remember Ryan White who passed away from AIDS-related illness thirty-one years ago today. The legislation enacted in his name has expanded access to care for people living with HIV/AIDS through medication coverage and financial assistance that can cover dental and housing needs. It has been critical in providing the support needed to achieve undetectable viral loads through medication adherence which prevents further transmission (also known as U=U, or undetectable=Untransmittable). At Frannie Peabody Center, we see the successful health outcomes that result from this model of care and the strategies that effectively connect people to the resources they need to stay healthy. LD 1115 would apply that same approach of lowering barriers and expanding access to these crucial HIV prevention methods. Maine has one of the highest rates of HIV viral load suppression nationally. We are at the forefront of ending the HIV/AIDS epidemic, but we cannot do it without accessible prevention tools.

I urge you to support LD 1115 as it will bring us closer to ending the HIV/AIDS epidemic.