

MaineHealth

MaineHealth Local Health Systems

Franklin Community
Health Network
LincolnHealth
MaineHealth Care At Home
Maine Behavioral Healthcare
Memorial Hospital
Maine Medical Center
Mid Coast-Parkview Health
NorDx
Pen Bay Medical Center
Southern Maine Health Care
Synernet
Waldo County General Hospital
Western Maine Health

Part of the MaineHealth Family

MaineHealth Accountable
Care Organization

MaineHealth Affiliates

MaineGeneral Health
New England Rehabilitation
Hospital of Portland
St. Mary's Health System

Testimony of Tiffany L. Townsend, NP, AAHIVS, MaineHealth In Support of LD 1115 “An Act to Improve Access to HIV Prevention Medications” Thursday, April 8, 2021

Senator Sanborn, Representative Tepler and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services, I am Tiffany Townsend, Nurse Practitioner and HIV Specialist at the Gilman Clinic at Maine Medical Center, and I am here to testify in support of LD 1115, “An Act To Improve Access to HIV Prevention Medications.”

MaineHealth is Maine’s largest integrated non-profit health care system that provides a full continuum of health care services to the residents of eleven counties in Maine and one in New Hampshire. As part of our mission of “Working Together So Maine’s Communities are the Healthiest in America,” MaineHealth strongly supports increasing access to affordable – and lifesaving – health care and medications. In fact, MaineHealth has established a policy to provide Free Care to all patients with incomes at or below 200% of the poverty level. Additionally, MaineHealth’s MedAccess program helps patients with limited resources acquire prescription drugs that would otherwise be inaccessible to them.

The Gilman Clinic (formerly the Virology Treatment Center) was formed in the early 1990s to treat those affected by the early HIV/AIDS epidemic. In the mid-1990s, we started treating hepatitis B and hepatitis C, and the complications that arise from these viruses. Our team includes infectious disease specialists, liver specialists, addiction specialists, nurses, social workers, behavioral health professionals, and pharmacists. We employ an interdisciplinary care model to prevent and treat the complex medical and social needs of our patients.

MaineHealth and our providers strongly support ensuring a patient’s access to PrEP and PEP medications. PrEP and PEP are effective at preventing HIV. They are safe medications, well-tolerated, and have few interactions with other medications. Looking toward the goal of eliminating 75% of new HIV infections by 2025 and 90% by 2030 ([HIV National Strategic Plan](#)), it is critical these medications be widely available and affordable to those at highest risk of

being exposed to HIV. The legislation before you today is a tool to help meet this goal by increasing and expanding access to PrEP and PEP, thereby decreasing HIV infections and ending this epidemic.

Another benefit of this legislation is that it expands access to care – by linking one seeking PrEP or PEP to care, or by increasing engagement for those that may be disconnected from their primary care provider. For those who are a victim of sexual assault when their primary care provider's office is closed, this legislation would allow them to access HIV prevention within the recommended 72-hour window, and follow-up with their primary care provider on the next business day.

A pharmacist licensed by the Maine Board of Pharmacy is recognized as an expert of medications and drug therapies. It is within the scope of a licensed pharmacist to dispense PrEP and PEP to patients as outlined in the proposed legislation. I would like to share one patient's story with you. I recently saw a young man in our clinic who reported he had asked his primary care provider twice for PrEP. Both times the provider said they would discuss it at his next visit. Within months, this patient had acquired HIV. Had he had access to PrEP at a pharmacy, he potentially could have been spared from this life-long chronic, expensive illness.

In short, we need to do all we can to remove barriers and expand access to these lifesaving medications and act to reduce HIV transmission. The legislation before you today will save lives, prevent severe morbidity, and reduce hospitalizations. With that said, I urge you to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1115.

Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.