

Testimony Kate Sharp
In Support of LD 673,
An Act To Create the Insulin Safety Net Program
Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services
April 13, 2021

Senator Sanborn, Representative Tepler, and distinguished members of the Committee, my name is Kate Sharp and I grew up in Harpswell and recently moved back to Portland. I'm here to urge you to support LD 673.

Every human being needs insulin to live. Most people, including, I imagine, most of the people on this committee, have bodies that make and distribute insulin for free. For the first 28 years of my life, mine did too. As a relatively newly diagnosed person with diabetes, I'd like to tell you, fresh from recent memory, what it feels like when you do not have insulin in your body.

In January 2020, I started drinking a lot of water. At first I was pleased with my unending hydrating, thinking I was just acing this whole "self-care" thing to start the new year. No matter how much water I drank, however, I was always thirsty. I started having to wake up five times a night to drink a pint of water and go to the bathroom. I bought a humidifier for my room because I felt so dry that my nose and lips would crack and bleed. I used to be incredibly active - exercising almost every day - but I found myself short of breath even walking up the stairs. I started having to work from home because I was too exhausted to make it through a full work day without resting.

The night before a big presentation at work I passed out climbing up the stairs. I couldn't keep food down. I couldn't keep the water I so desperately needed down. I woke up on the day of my presentation and my lips had turned blue. My boyfriend had to drive me to work because we didn't think I could manage to drive a car. Trying to give my presentation, my mouth wouldn't work properly. My lips stuck to my teeth they were so dry. I couldn't form words. My breathing was so labored I couldn't get through a full sentence. My coworkers were incredibly concerned - a few said I looked like I was having a heart attack or stroke. My employee begged me to go to the hospital.

I left work. My entire body screamed in pain. We got home and I had to crawl up the stairs to get into bed. My boyfriend convinced me to go to the ER. When we got there, I was seen almost immediately. My face was gray, my lips blue, and I couldn't breathe or speak. My blood had turned to acid inside my body. If my boyfriend hadn't convinced me to go to the hospital that day I would have almost certainly gone into a coma or died. The only reason I'm alive today was because they gave me insulin in the ER. I spent a week in the ICU.

This is what happens when your body doesn't get insulin. This happened to me because I didn't know I had diabetes, but this happens all the time to people who cannot afford to pay for their insulin. This should never happen to anyone because they cannot pay hundreds of dollars for a vial of something that every single one of us needs to live.