

L.D. 120, An Act to Lower Health Care Costs through the Establishment of the Office of Affordable Health Care

Testimony in Support

April 28, 2021

Good morning Senator Sanborn, Representative Tepler and the members of the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Committee,

My name is Morgan Suta. I was born and raised in Westport Island and Bowdoinham, Maine and have been a South Portland resident for the past twelve years. I am a working nurse with Maine Behavioral Health and a student psychiatric nurse practitioner at the University of Southern Maine and I am testifying in support of L.D. 120.

It is heartening to learn that 2021 health insurance rates in Maine have declined by an average 13.1% from plan year 2020. This is based on figures released in August 2020 from the Maine Bureau of Insurance.

But roughly 8% of the population in Maine, or 105,000 people, lack health insurance, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation (2019). And Maine people are more worried than ever about the costs of healthcare. A 2020 survey conducted by Maine Consumers for Affordable Health Care with West Health, a San Diego-based organization that advocates for the healthcare needs of seniors, tells us:

- That roughly 66, 000 Maine families have lost insurance coverage due to the economic consequences of the coronavirus pandemic.
- That healthcare costs are currently increasing for 3 out of 4 families in Maine.
- That nearly 200, 000 Maine families did not seek care for a health problem within the past year due to worries about the costs of care.
- That around 219,000 Mainers could not afford medication prescribed for them.
- That over 100,000 Mainers attributed the death of a friend or family member within the past 5 years to the inability to afford needed care (Maine Consumers for Affordable Healthcare, 2020).

These statistics make it clear that, although we have made headway in controlling healthcare costs, more needs to be done.

The Making Health Care Work for Maine package addresses these issues. In particular, L.D. 120 is an act to establish an Office of Affordable Health Care within the Maine Legislature, and, within that office, an Advisory Council on Affordable Health Care (An Act to Lower Health Care Costs through the Establishment of the Office of Affordable Health Care of 2021).

These bodies will analyze health care costs, growth trends and utilization patterns. They will examine alternative payment models for services and develop proposals to reduce costs and improve consumer experience. Other bills in the five-bill package address prescription drug

prices and the cost of insulin, critical issues for Maine health care consumers (Deschambault, 2021).

The time for L.D. 120 and the rest of the bills in the Making Health Care Work for Maine package to pass and receive full funding is NOW. Mainers can't wait any longer for health care reform, and a state government body dedicated to cost oversight and improvement of health care services is a must-do for our state. If L.D.120 and its associated bills are allowed to fail, many Mainers who faced unmanageable health care costs pre-pandemic and who now, due to Covid, may have reduced income as well as big medical bills, will simply run out of options. The health-related consequences, and the impacts on Mainers' lives, could be disastrous.

Thank you for your consideration.

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