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Testimony of Sen. Eloise Vitelli introducing
LD 686, An Act To Increase Prescription Drug Pricing Transparency
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services
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Senator Sanborn, Representative Tepler, esteemed members of the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Committee, my name is Eloise Vitelli, and I represent Senate District 23, which includes all of Sagadahoc County and the Town of Dresden in Lincoln County. I am before you today to introduce LD 686, An Act To Increase Prescription Drug Pricing Transparency.

So many components of our health care system are difficult to understand, navigate and plan for. Health care in this country is complicated and expensive, and often intentionally so. This is perhaps most true when it comes to prescription medications. Besides the headline-grabbing incidents of skyrocketing insulin prices, EpiPen price hikes or the apparent price gouging of decades-old generic drugs, Mainers face this on a smaller scale every day.

Even before the pandemic, Mainers were struggling to afford their medications. In 2017, three in ten Maine residents age 19 to 64 reported that they had stopped taking a medication as prescribed due to cost.¹ Leaving prescriptions unfilled, skipping or rationing doses, or otherwise not taking medication as prescribed can be dangerous and even deadly. This is tragic when we learn of it happening to a stranger in the news. It is devastating when it happens to us, our loved ones or our neighbors.

Picture this: Your doctor says you – or your child – need this medication to be healthy. But you can't afford it. You can't find information to explain to you why this medication costs so much, or why a drug you've been taking for years is suddenly prohibitively expensive. You look for programs that might be able to help you pay for this medicine, but they are few and far between. Perhaps you resort to crowdfunding this treatment, but your family and friends are stretched thin, too. You're faced with the hard decision between purchasing this medication and putting food on the table, or fixing the car you need to get to work every day. It's a terrifying picture, but it's one far too many Mainers are faced with far too often.

¹ <https://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/politics/advocacy/2019/09/rx-state-infographic-three-issues-maine.pdf>

This includes a constituent of mine from Phippsburg, who reached out to me over the summer, in the midst of the pandemic. The cost of his medication had suddenly gone up, into the thousands of dollars, and he couldn't afford it anymore. We helped connect him with the assistance we could, but he was understandably frustrated, confused and afraid. Why was this medicine suddenly so expensive? We couldn't find an answer.

Here in Maine, we've made significant strides in collecting data about the price of prescription drugs and what contributes to increases. LD 686 would further clarify and focus the Maine Health Data Organization's ability to request data, streamline the reporting process, and make the information more accessible to the public. After all, they are the ones paying these high prices; they are the ones who skip doses or stop taking their medicine when they can no longer afford it.

Shining a light on these price increases is the best way to make informed policy decisions to combat these outrageous prices. It gives us the tools we need to prioritize the health of Mainers, not the profit margins of drug companies. Without this information, we are unable to act. At the federal level, this obstruction has worked for far too long. Here in Maine, we have the opportunity to put an end to it.

Thank you for your consideration of this bill, and of all the bills you're hearing today that would make quality health care more accessible to Mainers. I'm happy to take questions at this time.