

Dear Senator Sanborn, Representative Tepler and Members of the Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance & Financial Services,

I am a family doctor actively practicing at a federally qualified health center in Springvale. I am in strong support for LD 1196 An Act Regarding Targets for Health Plan Investments in Primary Care and Behavioral Health. I think this bill is very important because:

1. By allocating money to primary care and behavioral health it will lower overall health care costs
2. It will help improve the care given to patients
3. It will improve access to primary and behavioral health care
4. It will make Mainers more healthy and more productive in the workforce

**I want to focus this writing, not on the strong data that shows how investing in primary and behavioral health care lowers cost (because you can easily find that), but on the stories of Mainers who are losing out.**

A great example is my patient Mary (using a different name for privacy). She is a 49 year old single mom who is on disability with bipolar disease. Four years ago, she became addicted to opioids and went into a downward spiral overdosing and almost losing custody of her children. She gradually connected with a psychiatrist who helped her control her bipolar disease and was started on suboxone by her primary care doctor for her addiction. Now, she has not used drugs in almost two years, is caring for her teenage daughters, just became a minister, is looking to get off disability, and wants to create a community center in her town for those struggling with addiction.

There are other stories like Mary but unfortunately, they don't happen as often as they should. Mainers struggle to find a primary care doctor accepting new patients. If they are likely to have one, they and their doctor then struggle to set them up with a psychiatrist. If their addiction is severe and they need an inpatient rehab program...good luck...they go on wait lists, or go weeks to months without getting in.

**Can you imagine the uproar in the press if people were having heart attacks but couldn't see a cardiologist or get into a hospital for weeks or months? So, why are we ok if this happens to someone using drugs or has a severe mental illness** (the story is very similar for them by the way)? But we can change this...you can change this. This bill is one step to change all of this.

You may now be asking; how will this bill really change that? People like Mary don't just get better overnight...there is no antibiotic to take for 7 days nor a surgery to fix her. It takes many visits with doctors and counselors along with daily medications but it also takes non clinical social workers and care managers to help the Mary's get health insurance, find rides to the appointments, find safe housing, and be able to put food on the table for her children. **Primary care and behavioral health providers know this and are desperately trying to find a way to do this with their reimbursement rates (which barely covers their expenses for each visit with the patient).**

There is a good reason why you don't see many independent primary care or psychiatry practices anymore – it's not a sustainable business. There is also a good reason why there is such a shortage of primary care doctors and psychiatrists – they are the lowest paid specialties in medicine.

In addition to caring for patients, I am also a clinical faculty for Tufts University School of Medicine Maine Track Program which is designed to bring more physicians to Maine. Whenever I ask the students why they don't plan on going into primary care, I repeatedly hear the lower salary compared to other specialties as a major reason. If Maine can invest in primary care and behavioral health, then I think Maine will have an advantage to recruit more of these doctors to our state.

**I hope you will strongly consider voting in favor for LD 1196. I really feel this bill will make Maine's healthcare system stronger, will lower costs, and will Mainers healthier.**

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your time and for everything you do for Mainers.

Sincerely,

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