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Portland

Testimony in support of LD 1196: An Act Regarding Targets for Health Plan Investments in Primary Care and Behavioral Health

I'm Susannah Daggett and I'm a 4th year medical student in the Tufts University Maine Track program. I grew up in Yarmouth, went to college in Boston and returned to Maine to study medicine with the goal of becoming a primary care doctor and practicing in my home state. Thank you to the Chairs and committee members for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 1196 today.

One of the reasons why I'm excited to go into primary care is the capacity to make a real, long-lasting difference in a patient's life. Here's one example - this year I worked with a patient at Togus VA Hospital who was struggling with severe PTSD from a traumatic event during her service. She'd also lost her job at the beginning of the pandemic, and with isolation plus some of her trauma resurfacing, she was using alcohol to cope. When I met her, she was scared, alone, and seeking help. In the primary care & integrated behavioral health model, we were able to get her connected with a counselor who focused on trauma. We monitored her risk of alcohol withdrawal and helped her stop drinking safely, with a nurse on our team who called her weekly to check in and strengthen her motivation to cut back. A social worker in the practice helped her apply for unemployment benefits she didn't know she was eligible for. Six months later when our paths crossed again, she was sober, in a much better place with her mental health, and was optimistic about her future.

In treating root causes, primary care has the potential for the biggest impact. I've seen a patient hospitalized twice for a severe foot infection, when what they really needed was longterm treatment of their underlying diabetes, or safe housing so that their feet could be warm and dry. Primary care is so inventive, and persistent, and adaptive. More and more we're drawing on the expertise of an interdisciplinary team with our behavioral health colleagues - and patients are seeing the benefit.

Our payment models just need to catch up.

LD1196 would help Maine move to a system that emphasizes health and prevention, treatment of the whole person, and will ultimately help patients live their best lives.

Thank you for your time.