

Ed Fallon
Maine People's Alliance

Senator Sanborn, Representative Tepler, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services: thank you for the opportunity to testify today in favor of LD 1196.

My name is Ed Fallon and I am here today as a leader of the Maine People's Alliance member lobby team. MPA is Maine's largest community action organization with over 32,000 members across the state. Our mission is to create a world where everyone has what they need, contributes what they can, and no one is left behind.

MPA supports LD 1196, which would increase the investments made by health plans in both primary care and behavioral health. We all know that our health care system is one of the most expensive in the world and that our health outcomes do not match how much we pay. Other states have begun to shift resources towards primary care as a way to both improve outcomes and lower costs by preventing health issues and better managing chronic disease. This bill is an opportunity for Maine to apply their lessons learned and expand the idea to include behavioral health as well. This is especially important in a state where so many of our residents are older and more likely to have multiple chronic health issues.

As a veteran, I am concerned that returning veterans with PTSD or other mental health issues will not find their way to proper treatment and turn to harmful drugs as a way to self-medicate. After serving our country, we should not abandon them to manage their mental health on their own. This bill will increase the resources available for our veterans and all Mainers to get access to the treatment they need and support those with substance use disorders on a path to recovery.

Investing in primary care and behavioral health is also a critical step towards addressing the racial disparities in our health outcomes that have been laid bare during the pandemic. Maine at one point had the greatest coronavirus racial disparities in the nation. This is a moral issue as well as a health care issue. Research has shown that investing in primary care can address health equity because it invests in the system with the widest reach and greatest continuity.

Investing in primary care is also a fiscally and economically pragmatic policy. Upstream health care interventions reduce health care costs. Rhode Island was the first state to enact a similar policy. Between 2008 and 2012, Rhode Island increased primary care spending from 5.7% to 9.1% and saw total health care expenditures fall 14%.

LD 1196 will steadily increase resources, and as a result, access to the critical primary care and behavioral health care in Maine that we need. This will help us better prevent and manage our health issues, reduce the racial disparities in our health outcomes, and lower our long-term costs.

Maine People's Alliance supports LD 1196 and the steps it takes towards leaving no one behind. I urge you to vote Ought to Pass.

Thank you for your time.

Ed Fallon
Maine People's Alliance

For questions, please contact Cate Blackford at cate@mainepeoplesalliance.org