

Katharine Potter
Brunswick

Dear Senator Sanborn, Representative Tepler and Members of the Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance & Financial Services. We are writing on behalf of our pediatric primary team at Martin's Point Healthcare in Brunswick, Maine.

We are writing today in support of LD 1196 to support Mainers at a fundamental level: pediatric primary care. As primary care pediatricians, we help children to create the foundation for a lifetime of healthy habits.

In this past year, our role in the healthcare system has never been made more clear. The covid pandemic has exposed the frailty of our primary care system and exposed its limitations. As the pandemic evolves, our patients are struggling to keep stable the healthy foundation we have helped them to build. Physically, our pediatric patients are beginning to show adverse side effects as a result of poor nutrition, substantial increases in screen exposure and the loss of organized and informal physical exercise, all habits bolstered by routine checkups.

More alarmingly, we have seen a huge increase in the demand for mental health services. Just this past week, our team was notified that the only established psychiatric resource we had left in our community is not taking new referrals. We are, quite literally, without any psychiatrists for our patients for a population in which 1 in 5 struggle with some form of mental illness. This puts the onus on us, as primary care providers, to both diagnose psychiatric conditions and manage the complexities of mental health polypharmacy and care. The unacceptable alternative is to allow these patients' symptoms to deteriorate, possibly to the point of acute suicidality and requiring in-patient psychiatric care. This further burdens the healthcare system and fails our children and their families.

According to the Center for Mental Health Services, the yearly cost for mental illness in children is \$247 billion dollars nationally, representing a major public health crisis in the United States, with the demand for mental health services estimated to double amidst this pandemic. At a state level, funding under the LD1196 bill would potentially support these mental health efforts at a preventative level and keep our children alive.

Primary care and behavioral health care are essential medical services for all people. As a pediatric primary care providers in Brunswick, we see first-hand how prioritizing the health of our children, physically and mentally, is crucial to preventing lifelong illness.

Sincerely,

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