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May 5th, 2021

Senator Heather Sanborn
Representative Denise Tepler
Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services
% Legislative Information Office
100 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333

RE: Testimony in support of the following bills:

LD 323, "An Act Regarding Insurance Coverage for Telehealth Services" LD
333, "An Act Regarding Telehealth"
LD 849, "An Act To Make Permanent the Telehealth Reimbursement Options
Passed by Emergency Measures"
LD 1681, "An Act Regarding Telehealth Services for Certain Licensees of the
Office of Professional and Occupational Regulation and Certain Licensees
Affiliated with the Department of Professional and Financial Regulation"

Senator Sanborn, Representative Tepler and distinguished members of the Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services Committee:

Maine Family Planning (MFP) has been providing telehealth services since 2014. However, there have been significant hurdles over the years that have made this challenging or even impossible for some people in our state to access, particularly those who live in areas with poor internet service and without adequate technology. When Covid-19 arrived, MFP immediately pivoted to assure that Mainers could continue receiving quality reproductive health care, including contraception, STI testing and treatment, and primary care. We never closed our doors and in fact, because of the changes in telehealth policies due to the Public Health Emergency, we were able to provide services to Mainers who otherwise may not have had a way to obtain the care they needed.

As telehealth providers reaching people throughout the state, Maine Family Planning unequivocally supports LD 323, LD 333, and LD 849 and LD 1681. Allowing the option for services by audio only opens care options for many people who do

not have reliable internet access. Similarly, allowing patients to provide their consent verbally has allowed us to provide care to all Mainers regardless of their equipment or familiarity with technology.

To continue this model post-pandemic, it is essential that health insurance carriers and MaineCare reimburse telehealth services at an equal rate to that of in-person services. We believe that all Mainers deserve equal access to obtain their healthcare. Finally, the varied methods of telehealth services, including asynchronous encounters and store and forward transfers, would allow us to further expand options to Mainers who may have challenges in accessing our services during regular business hours. Those working multiple jobs or on long shifts, caring for family members, and with limited options for services outside regular business hours could continue to have their reproductive health needs met by our clinicians.

Patient surveys conducted by MFP during the pandemic revealed many reasons why our patients like the option for telehealth services. Quoting directly from the survey:

- “saved time and gas”
- “not having to take as much sick time from work”
- “quick and convenient”
- “no need for a mask as I was alone in the room, so my points could be made better with full facial expressions”
- “sometimes it is easier to discuss matters when you are not face to face.”

Less than one third of patients when asked, *If there was no pandemic and you could have chosen to have this visit through telehealth or in person, which would you have preferred?* indicated that they would prefer in-person care. We anticipate, and are preparing for, telehealth services to continue to be an integral component of the reproductive health services we offer.

During the pandemic, Mainers have not been forced to choose between risking their health to travel and enter a clinic merely because they did not have adequate internet, health insurance coverage, or the ability to take off time from work. We believe that all Mainers deserve to continue to make the decision to access reproductive health care independent of these factors.

Sincerely,

George A. Hill
President/CEO