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Testimony of Representative Poppy Arford

LD 1045 An Act To Support Universal Health Care

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage Insurance and Financial Services

Good morning, Senator Sanborn, Representative Tepler and esteemed colleagues of the Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services Committee, I am Poppy Arford, honored to represent House District 49, which embraces the western half of Brunswick. I am testifying this morning as a proud cosponsor in support of LD 1045, An Act to Support Universal Health Care.

I speak with you this morning, trusting that what I say will adequately express how critical, how important the single-payer policy of affordable, comprehensive, publicly funded health care for all Maine people put forward by LD 1045 is for our people and our state. How profoundly I believe that universal, publicly funded healthcare, commonly referred to as single payer, is the only just and equitable path forward to ensuring that every Mainer can afford the health care they need, be it medical, behavioral, dental or eye care - outpatient, inpatient or residential. LD 1045 requires the State to implement this everyone in, no one left out policy through the "Maine Health Care Plan" set to begin January 1, 2024.

Thank you, Representative Brooks, for this bill and for your testimony which lays out the background, plan description, and urgent need resulting from the pandemic for passage of this bill. Out of respect to the committee, and my agreement with Rep. Brooks remarks, I will focus on why I support LD 1045 and not repeat what has already been so well stated.

I am 100% committed to single-payer policy and passing legislation which implements it. Why? For starters, as much as I dislike campaign promises, I did make one and only one promise to my constituents while campaigning last year. The promise was that I would not come home from Augusta until single-payer legislation was enacted ensuring that comprehensive health care is affordable for every Mainer. Although complicated and challenging, there is no doubt in my mind that the Maine Legislature has the intelligence, the work ethic and the courage to deliver such transformative change in the way we finance and deliver health care in Maine.

Since 2008 when my husband was diagnosed with cancer and I was catapulted into being a patient advocate for him, I have had the privilege of representing health care consumers and patient interests on

many health care system improvement initiatives in Maine. This includes the statewide PCMH program, Aligning Forces for Quality, the State Innovation Model, and the Maine Choosing Wisely Community Campaign. I list these initiatives to give you an idea of the breadth and depth of what has been done already to improve the quality of care and address the ever-rising cost of healthcare in Maine. In one way or another, these programs have acted to identify how the current system falls short, then develop strategies and programs to fix it, to achieve the triple aim of improving patient experience of care, the health of populations and to reduce the per-capita cost of health care. Despite many committed people working very hard and millions of dollars spent by organizations, foundations, state and federal government on these efforts, in truth we find ourselves today with incremental progress and a still fragmented, still unaffordable health care delivery and financing system. For further information please see the “Sources and Resources” provided below.

The bottom line is this. Even with all these improvements the truth is that Maine people are still struggling, still suffering, as the health care they need is still financially beyond their reach and they are either going into debt or going without. The solution is found in a publicly funded, single-payer financing system, which will act to realize health care system improvement and affordability for all.

Please support single payer policy and LD 1045. Thank you. I am happy to answer questions.

Sources and Resources:

See: [A 2020 survey by Maine AllCare](#), found 78.1% of respondents find our current healthcare system unaffordable, and the majority of respondents still struggle to access care.

See: A [recent survey](#) by Maine Consumers for Affordable Health Care and West Health which found an increasing number of Mainers are struggling to access and pay for health care including nearly 200,000 Maine families who did not seek treatment for a health problem due to the cost of care, and 100,000 Mainers who have lost a friend or family member in the past five years because they could not afford necessary medical treatment.

See: “Assessing the Costs and Impacts of a State Level Universal Health Care System in Maine” prepared for Maine AllCare by Maine Center for Economic Policy. <https://maineallcare.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Assessing-the-Costs-and-Impacts-of-State-Level-Universal-Health-Care-in-Maine.pdf>

See: The [MaineCare Member Handbook](#) for description of programs and coverage

See: Maine State Innovation Model <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/sim/#:~:text=In%202013%2C%20Maine%20was%20awarded,for%20Medicare%20and%20Medicaid%20Innovation.>

See: Maine Patient Centered Medical Home <https://www.pcpcc.org/initiative/maine-patient-centered-medical-home-pilot>

See: Maine Health Data Organization <https://mhdo.maine.gov/>

See: Maine Quality Counts Choosing Wisely Community Campaign <https://www.choosingwisely.org/grantee/maine-quality-counts-2/>