

Geoff Gratwick
Bangor

LD 1045: Health Care, Insurance and Financial Services Committee

Geoff Gratwick, May 12, 2021

Good morning Senator Sanborn, Representative Tepler and Honorable Members of the HCIFS Committee. I am Geoff Gratwick, live in Bangor, am a member of Maine AllCare, and here in support of LD 1045.

I practiced clinical medicine for 40 years and loved it; it's the best of professions and I was very fortunate. However, with the passage of time I became increasingly dismayed. Too many of my patients were unable to get the care they needed due to its cost and our increasingly confusing and complex insurance bureaucracy. So, when I retired, I set off in a new direction to practice a different kind of medicine here in the legislature – health care policy medicine. Again, I loved the work here in Augusta but again I became dismayed because we didn't seem to be able to deal with the root cause of our dysfunctional medical care system – its out-of-control profit underlayment.

To be sure I observed some progress. Several examples: your committee used to be called the Insurance and Financial Services Committee but is now the HCIFS, in recognition of how much time you spend on health care. The Health Care task force in 2018 brought together a group of experts, produced an excellent report - but this report now gathers dust on a library shelf. The Task Force lacked a mandate to make its recommendations operational. There have been many other bills which have plugged holes in our health care system but there are none that challenge the fundamental problem: medicine is now all about money.

Our health care system is sick. You all know this. You are going to hear a lot about the various illnesses that beset it today. You are going to hear about treatments. You are also going to hear from the nay-sayers.

The most important part of the bill before you, LD 1045, is the establishment of the Maine Health Care Board. At the risk of being presumptuous the specifics of this bill, many of which are excellent and well thought out, are not important at this stage. The important thing is the Board itself. It will have expertise, the ability to make hard decisions, and have the time needed to come up with a good plan and put it into operation. It will incorporate many feedback loops, be self-correcting - a work in progress. This bill can make a rational health care system a reality, it can save money, it can save lives, it can make your committee the most important committee of the Legislature as it will be on the front line, serving the needs of the people of Maine, for years to come.

The change will be incremental; it will not occur magically on January 1 of a future year. A new improved organization of healthcare will roll out step by step, changing as needed, taking advantage of the best thought at the time. I am a big believer in evolution and feedback loops. The roll out will be similar to the marijuana legislative saga – a major conceptual leap forward and then years of work on a myriad of details by the Board and the Legislature.

As legislators you are used to criticism. You will be criticized if you do not pass this bill, if you do nothing. Costs will continue to increase, resources will be diverted, and your grandkids will lack the education and roads and bridges they need. They will ask you why you didn't do something when you had the chance.

Or, you will be criticized if you pass this bill - for being radicals, socialists, for upsetting the comfortable status quo. Each small glitch will be magnified and become fodder of ideological zealots and it will all be your fault.

I recommend that you think and act big, acknowledging that there will be bumps in the road but that the goal is worth it.

I hope you will vigorously debate LD 1045, pass it on to the full Legislature, and with it establish a flexible, powerful, broad-based Board that in 3-4 years will guide us down the road to a functional, responsive HC system that will better serve the health of all Mainers.