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Testimony of Rep. Sarah Pebworth in support of LD 1045 An Act to Support Universal Health Care

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

May 12, 2021

Sen. Sanborn, Rep. Tepler, and distinguished members of the Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services, I am Sarah Pebworth. I represent District 133, which includes six towns on the Blue Hill Peninsula. I am here today in strong support of LD 1045.

My constituents have been asking for this for years. Four of the six towns I represent have approved healthcare resolutions in the past two years.

Whereas every person in Blue Hill deserves healthcare... begins the resolve adopted in my town.

From Brooklin's: Whereas eliminating high administrative costs and waste would be beneficial to families and businesses

The town of Brooksville requests that the Maine Legislature create an equitable health care plan that provides every Maine resident with comprehensive medical care.

Surry strongly urges the Maine Legislature to design and implement an equitable health care plan that provides every Maine resident with comprehensive medical care from birth to death.

In giving testimony as a legislator, I have committed to myself to not being repetitive, to not bore the committee with information I know you already know. So deciding what I could say this afternoon in support of 1045 that will add to your knowledge or experience to assist you as you consider this legislation was a challenge. I know without asking that each of you has heard from constituents with healthcare concerns, even healthcare crises. Perhaps you are an elected representative today because you hoped you could do something to help, perhaps you requested this very committee to be closer to this very problem. What if this bill were the answer?

Maine's health care system is the product of World War II crisis management, 1960s federal reforms—Medicare, Medicaid, and profit-driven health care integration beginning in the 1980s. It is marked by uncontrollable costs—the US spends more on healthcare than any other country, yet we still lack or have inadequate coverage for tens of thousands of Mainers. Our system is rife with economic and cultural biases, unnecessary complexity, waste, reduced patient choice, professional burnout, rural hospital closures, and job lock for workers who are terrified to go without health insurance.

Over the years, legislators have introduced a variety of health care reforms to address some of these problems but, just as a new muffler and spark plug won't "fix" a jalopy, these piecemeal efforts can't "fix" such a dysfunctional system. Rep. Brooks' Maine Health Care Act could. By creating a publicly funded and still privately provided universal health care system, LD 1045 would address every one of the problems listed above, every one.

The US ranks #1 in so many categories—but how can we be the richest, most powerful country yet rank so much lower in health outcomes? Mainers are frugal and we darn well want to get what we pay for. When it comes to healthcare, we aren't.

Would implementing this significant reform be easy? No, we know it wouldn't. Changing a critical system would be a huge challenge, but Maine's response to the coronavirus epidemic has shown we are capable of meeting huge challenges. And our motto—Dirigo—says we aren't afraid.

My constituents have been asking for this for years, Maine has needed this for years. Please pass LD 1045.

Thank you for your time.

<https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/issue-briefs/2020/jan/us-health-care-global-perspective-2019>