

February 15, 2022
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Dear Committee Members,

Hello I'm a 48 year-old former nurse who cared for our population of those suffering debilitating effects from Alzheimer's and Dementia. I'm now currently disabled & suffering from symptoms of a chronic autoimmune condition as well as living in chronic pain myself. I'm writing to you to oppose bill LD1636 "An Act To Reduce Prescription Drug Cost " I think we can all agree that our Healthcare System is in need of work overall but our population of elderly, veterans, disabled, those suffering from chronic illnesses and conditions often face additional barriers obtaining care and services they need. This is in addition to navigating and qualifying for much needed funding if available to assist with the high costs of prescription drugs, dental care, hearing aids, eyeglasses and the like. Sometimes they're already forced to choose between these very things, putting food on the table or paying rent thus in many instances leading them to choose the latter & not get the medications they need.

I think we can also agree in general that we all want to lower the cost of prescription medications. My issue however lies in the measurement system used to determine and assign value to a person's life using the Quality Adjusted Life Year (QALY). This very system puts those at-risk populations I spoke of above at an even greater disadvantage by assigning a lesser value on their lives right out of the gate. Which in turn leads to yet another barrier because they at times can't even qualify for important medications which would likely improve their quality of life. Instead the opposite happens leading to even greater suffering and lesser quality of life. I feel its also very important to point out that this affects more than just a patient disqualified under the "QALY" measure; it trickles down to their families, spouses, children, friends, employers, the teachers who teach our children and our community in general. This very population of Maine's people also make up a large number of the volunteers needed to run programs or help larger organizations offer support & or services within our very communities of which in turn contributes to feelings of a greater sense of purpose, making a difference and simultaneously helps so many in numerous ways. I think we overlook & or don't factor in that these flawed additional barriers lead to greater suffering all around and even further increases the risks for alcohol and drug abuse, verbal, emotional, physical, sexual abuse and domestic violence in the home. As well as increasing kids in the home chances of suffering from mental health, physical conditions and behavior issues & or vice versa with adults caring for sickly children unable to get what they need. All of this adds greater degrees of increased stressors & often times diminished coping abilities which in turn contributes to additional systemic health conditions & or mental health issues. In the long run these factors add up to more than it would have been to approve a medication initially. Many chronic pain patients have already fallen into a gap of greater suffering & are now discriminated against after having lost medications due to opioid reform of which was needed but is also flawed as there's barriers or even lack of supportive care & treatments options offered & covered for chronic pain. When you live in chronic pain and or are chronically ill even the smallest of gains is a huge win, it really can make all the difference in a person's quality of life and the lives of those around them.

The "QALY" system is flawed in other ways that it discriminates & de-values the lives of our people as well but in relation to how it pertains here in this bill it will create additional barriers & greater suffering for our aging & disabled population to be considered for & or obtain medications they need which would aid improving their quality of life. I strongly urge you to re-evaluate your position in supporting this bill as written until the "QALY" factor has been addressed because all lives should be about achieving a better quality of life no matter the circumstances. We Can and Must do Better for the Maine People as that is truly "The Way Life Should Be". I Thank you for your time & consideration.

Sincerely, Kristi Harkins