

Statement of Abbie Strout-Bentes, Director of Education and Community Engagement, Mabel Wadsworth Center to the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services

February 15, 2022

LD 1954 Out to Pass

Senator Sanborn, Representative Tepler, and members of the joint committee of Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services, my name is Abbie Strout-Bentes, I am the director of education and community engagement at Mabel Wadsworth Center. Mabel Wadsworth Center is the only independent, not-for-profit, feminist health center in Maine. We provide comprehensive sexual and reproductive healthcare, including prenatal care, abortion care, birth control, STD testing and treatment, cancer screenings, and other wellness care.

Mabel Wadsworth Center has been providing sexual and reproductive healthcare for folks living in the greater Bangor area for over 35 years. We have an excellent reputation in our community for providing high-quality, client-centered and trauma-informed healthcare.

I am writing on behalf of our organization to encourage you to support LD 1954, An Act To Ensure Access to Prescription Contraceptives.

At Mabel Wadsworth Center, individualized care is central to our mission. We work with our patients to offer information, answer questions and provide support as they make the best decisions for their lives. This is the approach we take when helping patients determine the right birth control method. From our decades of experience, we know that finding the right method isn't always easy and people often try multiple types of birth control before landing on the method that works best for their body, health and lifestyle. Here is a list of some of the questions we help a patient answer when they are trying to decide on the best birth control option for them: Is it simple to use? How often do I need to refill or replace it? How does it work? How effective is it? How will it affect my partner? How will it impact my health? We give them time to weigh their options and offer medical guidance. Once they decide on a method, unfortunately, there are more questions: will my insurance cover the prescription and can I afford it?

Currently the Affordable Care Act requires insurers to provide coverage for one contraceptive product within each method category with no cost sharing. As a result many options are left out because they fall within a larger category despite having significant differences from their fully covered counterparts. At our health center we witness patients having to make difficult decisions about whether to use the birth control method that works best for them or to use the one that is covered by their insurance with no out-of-pocket cost. LD 1954 will address gaps in the coverage requirements and put patients, with the guidance of their healthcare provider, back in charge determining what prescription is best.

The most effective type of birth control for an individual is the one that they are able to use consistently and correctly. Our patients are more likely to be successful in using a contraceptive correctly when it is their method of choice. This legislation would ensure that any person seeking prescription contraceptives under a state-regulated health insurance plan will be able to access the best birth control method for them, not just the product that their insurance company has deemed most cost-effective. Birth control is essential healthcare and equal access to all birth control options is a critical part of creating a world where all people get to decide for themselves when and whether to become pregnant.

We urge you to vote "ought to pass" on LD 1954. Thank you.