

May 7th, 2023

In support of LD 1577 - An Act to Require Health Insurance Coverage for Biomarker Testing.

Good morning Senator Bailey, Representative Perry, and members of the Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services Committee. My name is Mikala Bousquet and I live in Topsham. I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker with 8 years of experience currently serving as an oncology social work navigator in the outpatient setting and I am the State Lead Ambassador for the American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network (ACSCAN). I write to you today to express my strong support for the proposed legislation that would require insurance coverage for biomarker testing when clinically appropriate.

As a social worker for cancer patients, I have had the privilege of working closely with countless individuals and families affected by cancer in our state. I have witnessed the physical, emotional, and financial toll cancer takes on those it touches. I have also seen the hope and resilience that can arise from effective, personalized treatment options.

Biomarker testing is an essential tool in the fight against cancer. This technology enables healthcare providers to identify specific genetic and molecular characteristics of an individual's cancer which can aid in identifying targeted treatment options that make their care more effective which, for many patients, means improved quality of life and increased chances at long term survival.

By ensuring access to biomarker testing, we help level the playing field for more cancer patients, regardless of their socioeconomic status and promote health equity in our state. Access to such a critical diagnostic tool should not be dictated by a patient's insurer or their inability to pay but rather by the potential benefit it may bring to their cancer treatment. What's more, coverage for clinically appropriate biomarker testing has the potential to reduce overall healthcare costs by

ensuring that providers can identify the targeted treatment early and avoid ineffective, costly, and often more toxic traditional treatments.

My role as an oncology social work navigator is to do my best to connect patients and families to resources of all kinds to improve their health outcomes and quality of life. The most heartbreaking thing I hear too often is that while they are always understandably anxious and scared of their diagnosis, so many are more afraid of the financial uncertainty or devastation that a cancer diagnosis can mean for themselves and their families. The amount of time I spend researching and applying for grants, public assistance programs, and charity care when patients are not able to make ends meet could be better spent supporting their emotional needs.

What I will share is that the hope that biomarker testing can bring to a patient and family is truly moving. I recently had a patient complete one round of her traditional chemotherapy while awaiting her biomarker testing results. She tolerated chemo so poorly and was not sure that she would be able to continue treating her disease. The relief when her oncologist told her that we had identified a targeted treatment option due to this testing availability and she would not need to have the chemo again was the jolt of encouragement that she needed. All patients deserve to have this type of individualized care when it is clinically appropriate for their cancer. It is what any one of us would hope for ourselves or our loved ones and the type of insurance they have should not matter.

In closing, I urge you all to support this legislation and ensure that more cancer patients in our state have access to this life changing care. The transformative impact of personalized care is not only the right thing to do but promotes health equity, reduces health care costs, and most importantly improves the quality of lives of those affected by cancer in the state of Maine.

Thank you so much for your time and consideration,

Mikala Bousquet, MSW, LCSW

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TOPSHAM
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