



Advocating the right to quality, affordable
health care for all Mainers.

P.O. Box 2490
Augusta, ME 04338
Telephone: 1-800-965-7476
Fax: 1-888-214-5233
www.maine cahc.org
consumerhealth@maine cahc.org

Testimony in Support of:

LD 1220, An Act to Require Lyme Disease Vaccine Coverage for State Regulated Health Plans

May 8, 2023

Senator Bailey, Representative Perry, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee On Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services, thank you for the opportunity to submit these comments in support of LD 1220, An Act to Require Lyme Disease Vaccine Coverage for State Regulated Health Plans.

My name is Ceilidh Shea and I am the Policy Advocate at Consumers for Affordable Health Care, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization that advocates the right to quality, affordable health care for every person in Maine. As designated by Maine's Attorney General, CAHC serves as Maine's Health Insurance Consumer Assistance Program (CAP), which operates a toll-free HelpLine. Our HelpLine fields approximately 6,000 calls and emails every year from people across Maine who need help obtaining, keeping, using, or fixing problems with private health insurance or with accessing or affording health care services. CAHC also serves as the Ombudsman program for Maine's Medicaid program, MaineCare, and helps people apply for and navigate the enrollment process for MaineCare. It is with that background that we provide these comments.

LD 1220 requires carriers to provide coverage for vaccines for Lyme disease authorized by the federal Food and Drug Administration without cost-sharing. Although a Lyme vaccine is not currently available, there is a vaccine for Lyme that is in its final clinical trial and could become available as soon as 2025. There was once access to a Lyme vaccine, LYMERix, but it was withdrawn from the market 20 years ago. The vaccine had fairly high efficacy, but some users blamed it for adverse reactions, including arthritis. As the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases notes, "analysis by the FDA and others did not support that conclusion" — but use of the vaccine plummeted, leading to it being discontinued.¹ The new vaccine works in a way that's similar to LYMERix, targeting an outer surface protein of the *Borrelia* bacteria that cause Lyme disease. But VLA15, the new vaccine, omits a protein region "that some had attributed to adverse events," according to the NIAID.²

Lyme disease is the second most commonly reported infectious disease in Maine.³ Through our HelpLine, we've heard from consumers about the ways their lives have been drastically altered by Lyme. Many have devastating and debilitating medical issues develop as a result of their infection. Arthritis, muscle weakness, chronic fatigue, headache, and fever are all common symptoms that vary in severity depending on the patient.⁴ According to FAIR health, Maine is the state with the third most private insurance claims

¹ <https://www.npr.org/2022/08/09/1116500921/lyme-disease-vaccine-final-clinical-trial-phase>

² <https://www.npr.org/2022/08/09/1116500921/lyme-disease-vaccine-final-clinical-trial-phase>

³ <https://data.maine public health.gov/data-topics/tickborne-content#:~:text=Maine%20has%20high%20rates%20of,at%20risk%20for%20the%20disease.>

⁴ <https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/lyme-disease/symptoms-causes/syc-20374651>

related to Lyme disease – a statistic that also increased in 2021 within the state, suggesting an increase in incidence of the infection.⁵ The need for a vaccine to protect against Lyme is needed.

The prevalence of ticks, and therefore the risk of contracting Lyme, are heightened by changes to Maine's climate. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control says ticks used to be confined to warmer climates. However, milder winters and longer, hotter summers have allowed deer ticks that carry Lyme to move into new areas of Maine that were previously too cold. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency says climate change may be playing a role in the rise of cases in areas of the U.S., including the Northeast part of the country.⁶ As tick populations continue to become more prevalent across our state, it is vital that Mainers who want to, have access to a vaccine as soon as one is available.

It is also important to emphasize the burden on the health care system that is caused by Lyme. Lyme costs the U.S. health care system between \$712 million and \$1.3 billion every year—an average of about \$3,000 per patient—in testing costs and repeat doctor visits. In the analysis, people with Lyme disease had 87% more doctors' visits and 71% more visits to the emergency room in the year after their diagnosis compared to demographically similar people who didn't have Lyme.⁷ A vaccine could offset many of these costs and could help prevent health issues related to Lyme, by deterring infection to begin with. For all of these reasons that I urge you to support LD 1220. Thank you and I'd be happy to answer any questions.

⁵ <https://spectrumlocalnews.com/me/maine/news/2022/08/02/new-data-suggests-lyme-disease-on-the-rise-in-maine>

⁶ <https://www.newscentermaine.com/article/news/health/tick-and-lyme/is-climate-change-helping-ticks-expand-their-range-maine-lyme-deer-dog-cdc-environmental-protection-north-tick-week-temperatures-winter-umaine-lab/97-f016f9e2-d3c5-4b0a-991a-3111ca0051b7>

⁷ Adrion ER, Aucott J, Lemke KW, Weiner JP (2015) Health Care Costs, Utilization and Patterns of Care following Lyme Disease. PLoS ONE 10(2): e0116767. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0116767>