



**Testimony at Maine's Joint Standing Committee on Health  
Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services**

*February 13, 2024*

Good afternoon. Thank you, Senator Bailey, Representative Perry, and members of the committee, for holding today's hearing, which includes consideration of a bill that would help prevent opioid addiction by expanding access to non-opioid treatments for acute pain.

My name is Chris Fox; I am the executive director of Voices for Non-Opioid Choices, and I am here today to speak in support of LD 2096 – An Act to Ensure Access to Nonopioid, Nonnarcotic Medication for Acute Pain Relief.

Founded in 2019, Voices for Non-Opioid Choices is a nonpartisan coalition dedicated to preventing opioid addiction before it starts by increasing patient and provider access to non-opioid therapies and approaches to manage acute pain. Voices members include leading representatives of patient and provider groups representing millions of individuals affected by the U.S. opioid epidemic.

As you are aware, Maine has been heavily impacted by the opioid epidemic. In 2020, more than 40 opioid prescriptions were written for every 100 people living in Maine. Tragically, between December 2021 and December 2022, there 621 opioid-related overdose deaths in Maine, accounting for 88 percent of all overdose deaths in the state. Nationwide, we lose more than 220 Americans every day to an opioid overdose and, for some, the path towards addiction begins after being prescribed opioids to manage an acute pain incident, such as for postsurgical pain, an accident, or sports injury.

Fortunately, this is a path to addiction that can be prevented by ensuring access to non-opioid approaches.

LD 2096 would ensure patients with Maine-regulated commercial health insurance plans can access FDA-approved opioid alternatives by requiring insurers to make these safe, non-addictive therapies available to their customers. Additionally, the bill would prohibit plans from steering patients towards opioids, including by prohibiting the use of step therapy or prior authorization.

The legislation being considered today mirrors a federal bill, the Alternatives to Prevent Addiction in the Nation (Alternatives to PAIN) Act, which was recently introduced in the United States House of Representatives. Voices for Non-Opioid Choices strongly supports and has advocated for passage of Alternatives to PAIN. Simply put, we must ensure that all patients can easily access non-opioid pain approaches across all care settings. This legislation will go a long way towards ensuring that patients can easily access non-addictive pain management approaches at the pharmacy counter.

The federal and state government must continue to work hand-in-hand to solve the opioid crisis currently taking place in Maine, and throughout the country. Maine has always been a place where common sense leads to bold solutions. Voices applauds the advancements proposed in LD 2069 and would like to see these efforts come to fruition.

Once again, thank you for making the time today to recognize and examine the importance of expanding access to non-addictive opioid alternatives throughout Maine. I urge the committee to take action to prevent opioid addiction before it starts and pass LD 2069.

Thank you.