



State of Maine | 131st Legislature
Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services
Testimony of Carter Friend on behalf of York County Community Action/Nasson Health Care
February 29, 2024

Supporting:
LD 2175, "An Act to Improve Access to Affordable Prescription Drugs in Underserved Areas"

Sponsored by President Jackson

Senator Bailey, Representative Perry, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance, and Financial Services, I am Carter Friend, CEO of York County Community Action and Nasson Health Care. Nasson is one of Maine's 19 community health centers (CHCs), also known as Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), and part of the largest independent primary care network in the state.

York County Community Action is a unique organization in that we are both a Community Action Agency and a Community Health Center. As a Community Action Agency, we implement programs and services to promote economic well-being and social well-being for individuals and families. This includes providing a strong start for young children; meeting basic needs; having warm, safe, dry and stable housing; creating economic opportunity; and providing transportation services. YCCAC provides social services to over 13,000 clients per year.

As a Community Health Center (through our FQHC, Nasson Health Care), we offer integrated, comprehensive health care to support patients' complete health, including primary medical care, behavioral health care and dental care. We provide health care services to over 9,000 patients per year to members of our community regardless of their health insurance status or ability to pay.

We strongly support LD 2175 and thank President Jackson and the cosponsors for bringing legislation forward that will provide much needed support for FQHCs to improve access and expand pharmacy services in Maine. Mainers are facing a critical shortage of access to affordable medications, especially in rural and underserved areas served by FQHCs. FQHCs want to be able to provide pharmacy services to the communities that they serve, yet existing health center revenues and resources are insufficient to support such development or expansion of current services.

LD 2175 would establish a grant program, overseen by the Office of Affordable Health Care, to provide support for FQHCs to develop or expand their capacity to provide greater access to affordably priced drugs for their patients by increasing FQHCs' ability to deliver pharmacy services to those patients.

At Nasson, prescription medication plays a central role in the treatment of many of our patients. For example, as a Health Care for the Homeless provider we work to ensure low-barrier access to primary care and other health services to homeless individuals and families. In 2022, we served over 1,100



homeless patients, a number that has increased steadily over the last few years. People who are homeless more frequently experience conditions such as HIV, lung disease (e.g., bronchitis and pneumonia), malnutrition, diabetes, hypertension, and exposure to the cold. They also often experience mental illness and substance use disorder, and they frequently need dental care. Many of these conditions require prescription medications. This grant program will help us serve these and other vulnerable patients in as low-barrier manner as possible, removing geographic and other barriers to access to prescription medication.

On behalf of York County Community Action and Nasson Health Care, thank you for considering our comments. Please do not hesitate to contact me directly at carter.friend@yccac.org with any follow up questions.

Carter Friend
CEO
York County Community Action