

ROBERT BARRETT  
Portland Community Free Clinic

To Members of the Health and Human Services Committee

I support LD 47. The merits of Maine's free clinics are obvious. We keep the working poor working! We connect poor Mainers who need health care with doctors, nurse practitioners, registered nurses, and community volunteers who give their time freely to provide this safety net. The Portland Community Free Clinic has been doing this work since 1993, mostly with private donations.

I am proud how the Portland Community Free Clinic has responded to the challenges of the past year. We were closed for two weeks in March, 2020, but re-opened to see patients by March 30. We also created a telehealth program "on the fly" to see patients, particularly those requiring counseling and behavioral health services. This has been very successful--from April 1, 2020 through the end of January 2021, we have had 168 telehealth encounters, which averages about 16-17 appointments per month. Prior to April, we had 0 telehealth capacity.

With proper screening of our patients, our volunteers have not stopped providing free care during this pandemic. The Free Clinic staff still answers every phone call that starts with a neighbor in crisis and has no idea how to navigate the system and ends with a plan of care, whether it includes the Free Clinic or not.

It has been a difficult year for our donors, too. Now, more than ever, free clinics in the state of Maine need state financial support.

Thanks for your time serving in the legislature and considering my support of LD 47.

Robert Barrett