

Testimony, Wednesday, February 10, 2021, 1 pm
Committee on Health and Human Services
LD 47: An Act to Fund the State's Free Health Clinics

Good afternoon, Sen. Claxton, Sen. Baldacci, Sen. Moore and Representatives:

I have been a volunteer mental health therapist at the Portland Community Free Clinic for six years. In the course of my service there, I have been a witness to the quality of treatment they provide to their clients – the people of the greater Portland area who have no health insurance. It is still shocking to me to see how many people in our midst - people with one or even 2 jobs (the case for most FC patients) - still have no access to affordable medical care. But because that situation currently exists, we are so fortunate to have this clinic that provides professional, thoughtful medical services to our low income neighbors who have no medical insurance.

I have seen, firsthand, the good work they do - quietly, without fanfare, with very modest resources, and in ways that often have to address the bureaucratic barriers that can get in the way of marginalized people getting good health care. They are resourceful and dogged in getting what is needed for their patients, and they do it with respect, good humor, and a can-do attitude. They are SUCH a good community resource.

I worked with a patient at the clinic who was struggling with issues related to caring for a disabled relative at home. In the course of our work, she showed me a large skin lesion. That day, she was given an appointment with the clinic's dermatologist. The diagnosis was serious, but her care was overseen by the clinic doctor, at no cost to her. She was successfully treated. I often wonder what would have happened if she had not been a Clinic patient.

Another patient, a retail worker, came for help with significant anxiety. Her anxiety was directly related to the fact that she had a heart problem – the problem itself was not life-threatening, but had ramifications for her overall health. Regular cardiac care was out of her financial reach, and emergency room visits due to periodic cardiac irregularity left her in debt for thousands of dollars. Her anxiety increased over her health and her financial situation. The Clinic paired her up with a primary care provider who sees her regularly, monitoring her heart condition as a part of her overall health care. As a result, her anxiety has greatly decreased.

There are so many stories like these. It would be wonderful if all Americans could be assured of decent medical care when they need it. But until that day, clinics like the PCFC will work to make sure that, for our neighbors without insurance, there is a place to go for excellent, reliable medical care.

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