

Patsy Leavitt
Buxton

To the Honorable Senators and Representatives of the Maine state legislature Health and Human Services Committee:

My name is Patsy Thompson Leavitt, of Buxton. I am writing in support of LD 47.

I am a nurse practitioner and former (retired) volunteer executive director of the Leavitt's Mill Free Health Center (LMFHC) (Bar Mills). Similar to the other 5 free clinics in Maine, LMFHC survived by fundraising and grant writing. We operated the clinic for over 15 years with a primarily volunteer staff.

In our 15 year experience, we learned several key points about uninsured patients. Contrary to popular belief, uninsured persons are not "clogging up" Emergency Departments seeking care for minor problems. On the contrary, the more likely scenario is that an uninsured patient will wait until they become quite ill before seeking care, thus risking their lives and placing a deep burden on the healthcare system. Additionally, and perhaps more importantly, they often defer or delay important preventive screenings and treatment for chronic illness such as heart disease, diabetes, and cancer.

Free clinics are considered "safety net" health care providers, filling the gaps of preventive screening, early intervention, and chronic disease management for uninsured persons. These interventions do not only benefit the individual, but society as a whole. Healthy community members are productive members of society, and do not place undue strain on the healthcare system.

In 2019, when the legislature opened MaineCare, many of LMFHC's patients were able to receive services elsewhere, and apply for ACA insurance or MaineCare. When the numbers of patients in our small clinic became so low as to not justify fundraising efforts, we made the decision to close the facility. As is the case nationwide, there still remained some patients who were unable to access care. These patients then were referred to other free clinics or to the local FQHC.

Unfortunately, despite progress made by the ACA, the need for Free Clinics still remains. I strongly urge the legislature to vote YES for LD 47 and authorize funding for same.

Sincerely,

Patsy Thompson Leavitt, DNP, FNP