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## **Testimony in Support of LD 47: An Act to Fund the State's Free Health Clinics**

February 9, 2021

Dear Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

I am Anita Ruff, Executive Director of the Oasis Free Clinics in Brunswick, and I am writing in support of LD 47. The mission of the Oasis Free Clinics (Oasis) is to strengthen our community by providing no-cost medical, dental and prescription assistance services to our uninsured neighbors in need. Oasis serves adults who live in Freeport, Durham, Brunswick, Harpswell and Sagadahoc County who are at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level. Currently, we provide our free services to over 450 of our neighbors. Almost all of our patients work, many of them multiple, and they either were not offered or cannot afford health insurance.

Our medical clinic provides primary care services, including acute care, chronic disease management, women's health, and preventive care. Our Community Prescription Assistance Program connects those with low-incomes to free medications through pharmaceutical free care programs, helping hundreds of people get lifesaving drugs. Our dental clinic offers x-rays, fillings, extractions, dental hygiene, and oral cancer screening. Finally, we help patients apply for MaineCare through our navigation program. On average, we leverage our budget of \$370,000 into almost \$2 million in free services for our community annually.

Oasis was created over 25 years ago because there was a gap in the healthcare system – there was no place for those experiencing homelessness to receive free healthcare with dignity and respect. Unfortunately, there continues to be gaps in our healthcare system for many people, especially those who experience poverty, struggle with mental health and substance use issues, have limited literacy skills, and who bring complex lives into the exam room. This is why Oasis and the other free clinics in Maine are important. We serve those who need something different than the traditional healthcare system and who are facing challenges that require more time than the typical 15-minute visit.

While MaineCare expansion has had a positive impact on many Oasis patients, it does not eliminate the need for Oasis nor the other free clinics in Maine. There is, and will continue to be, people who fall through the cracks and need the safety net of the free clinics.

Oasis has never received state nor federal funding. For over 25 years, we have been supported by individuals, religious organizations, businesses, the United Way, and private foundations. I ask that you join them by voting yes to support LD 47 so that the free clinics help more people in our communities.

Thank you for your consideration.