

Testimony, Wednesday, February 10, 2021, 1:00 pm
Committee on Health and Human Services
LD 47: An Act to Fund the State's Free Health Clinics

To: Sen. Claxton, Representative Meyer and Members of the Committee

I am Caroline Teschke, MD. I am the President of the Board of the Friends of the Portland Community Free Clinic (FPCFC). I write today in support of LD 47.

The Portland Community Free Clinic (PCFC) has served as a vital component of the healthcare safety net in Southern Maine for 28 years. The Friends of the PCFC was established in 2013 and is responsible for funding the work of the clinic. We have been successful in this endeavor, but the work to raise money is constant and ongoing and has been seriously impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This has increased the need for the services the PCFC provides while, at the same time, straining the resources of the organization. The PCFC has seen and expects a continued upsurge in demand as thousands of people continue to lose their jobs, income, and, in many cases, health insurance due to the ongoing pandemic. As hospitals' resources are strained by treating those most acutely ill with COVID-19, the need for primary care, mental health counseling, and outpatient care is greater than ever.

The PCFC cares for adults with incomes at or below 250% of the federal poverty level who lack health insurance. Typically, patients are low-income workers who are not offered health benefits through their employers. This number has increased over the last year, and current estimates are that between 72,000 and 131,000 Mainers have lost their employer health benefits or can no longer afford coverage in the ongoing pandemic. Approximately half these individuals may be eligible for MaineCare, but thousands will join the ranks of the uninsured. The PCFC is a vital resource of healthcare for these displaced and uninsured workers.

The PCFC operates on a modest budget of approximately \$10,000 to \$12,000 per month. The Friends is an entirely volunteer board, as are all the medical providers who see patients, and raises funds by obtaining competitive grants, holding community events including an annual golf tournament and conducting a Year End Appeal. In 2020, competition for funding has increased, and we are also finding that there is some 'donor fatigue' as more needs emerge. Since March 30th, the PCFC has seen an increase in uninsured patients. Some are former patients who have returned to the clinic, having lost their job and insurance; others are new patients with job and insurance losses. We are also seeing patients who have come to us from another free clinic that recently closed.

The 108 volunteer physicians, nurses, nurse practitioners, social workers, counselors, and receptionists who share their time and expertise allow the PCFC to offer high quality healthcare. Increased funding would also allow PCFC to expand its work serving uninsured adults who live in southern Maine. Specifically, it would be able to support expanded primary care access for additional uninsured patients. We would like to increase our current patient panel of 400-500 by at least 100. As part of its response to the pandemic, the clinic is now offering telehealth and would like to grow this capacity by 100%. This would provide greater safety for both patients and providers. There is an urgent need for mental health services at this time as patients and

their immediate family members suffer job loss, income loss, illness, and, in some cases, death. Telemedicine is of great relevance in the provision of effective mental health services.

Financial support to continue this work is essential. The Friends of the PCFC is dedicated to ensuring that high quality healthcare is provided by the PCFC. Funding will help assure that the PCFC continues to meet the rise in critical need brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic and continues to provide its vital safety net role in the medical landscape.

Thank you for your consideration and support of LD 47.