



***Testimony in support of LD 85***

**An Act Concerning MaineCare Coverage for Donor Breast Milk**

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Nicole Clegg and I serve as the Senior Vice President of Public Affairs at Planned Parenthood of Northern New England and am pleased to submit testimony in support LD 85.

Planned Parenthood of Northern New England provides comprehensive reproductive and sexual health care to more than 14,000 people in Maine at four health centers located in Biddeford, Portland, Sanford and Topsham. People turn to us for affordable, high-quality care including wellness exams, birth control, disease testing and treatment, and cancer screenings, abortion care as well as a variety of primary care services. We see everyone who comes to us regardless of ability to pay, and in a typical year, we provide more than \$4 million in free and discounted care to our communities in Maine. For many, we are their only access to the health care system.

As a mission driven health care provider, we fundamentally believe everyone should be able to make decisions about if or when to start a family and parent their children in safe and healthy communities, no matter where they live or how much money they make and we advocate for policies that help make this vision a reality.

Nearly 70 percent of our patients live at or below 200% of the federal poverty level and approximately a third of our patients are eligible for MaineCare. Legislation like LD 85 empowers new parents to make the decisions best for the health and well-being of their families. This legislation could alleviate the stress and emotional and financial burdens a new parent experiences when denied the critical care their newborn needs.

Research consistently shows that breast milk yields the best health outcomes for a newborn. When breast milk is not available, donor breast milk is a proven alternative to meet the nutritional needs especially for sick or preterm infants. That's why the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that infants are exclusively fed breast milk for up to the first six months of life, after which complementary foods can be introduced, with breastfeeding continuing for up to a year or longer. A 2016 Pediatrics study reported that hospitals which began offering donor milk to premature babies saw a 2.6 percent decline in rates of necrotizing enterocolitis (NEC), a serious disease that affects the intestines of these infants.

It's for these reasons that donor breast milk is recommended for parents who are unable to breastfeed, however, it can be an insurmountable unbudgeted expense for a new family, especially hard for people who are struggling to make ends meet.

At Planned Parenthood, we fundamentally believe everyone should be able to make the best decisions for themselves and their families. We believe all individuals should have the opportunity to parent the way they envision without choosing between either putting food on the table or paying their medical bills. This legislation will ensure those insured by MaineCare are empowered to provide the same care to their children that others already enjoy. For these reasons, I strongly urge you to vote to pass LD 85.