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Testimony of Representative Poppy Arford

LD 1608 An Act To Expand the MaineCare Program To Cover All Citizens of the State

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human services

Good morning Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and esteemed colleagues of the Health and Human Services Committee, I am Poppy Arford, honored to represent House District 49, which embraces the western half of Brunswick. Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you, as a proud cosponsor in support of LD 1608, An Act To Expand the MaineCare Program To Cover All Citizens of the State.

I speak with you this morning, trusting that what I say will adequately express how critical, how important the single payer policy of affordable, comprehensive, publicly funded healthcare for all Maine people put forward by LD 1608 is for our people and our state. How profoundly I believe that it is the right, the only just and equitable path forward to ensuring that every Mainer can afford the healthcare they need be it medical, behavioral, dental, or eye care - outpatient, inpatient or residential. LD 1608 requires the State to implement this everyone in, no one left out policy through the “MaineCare for All Program”..

Thank you Representative Sylvester for this bill and for your testimony which lays out the background, need for, and implementation phases in the “MaineCare for All Program”. Out of respect to the committee and my agreement with Rep. Sylvester, I will focus on why I support LD 1608 and not repeat what has already been so well stated.

I am 100% committed to single payer policy and passing legislation which implements it. Why? For starters, as much as I dislike campaign promises, I did make one and only one promise to my constituents while campaigning last year. The promise was that I would not come home from Augusta until single payer legislation was enacted ensuring that comprehensive healthcare was affordable for every Mainer. Although very complicated and extremely challenging to deliver, there is no doubt in my mind that the Maine legislature has the intelligence, the work ethic, and the courage to deliver such transformative change in the way we finance and deliver healthcare in Maine.

Since 2008 when my husband was diagnosed with cancer and I was catapulted into being his caregiver and a patient advocate, I have represented healthcare consumers and patient interests on many healthcare system improvement initiatives in Maine. This includes the statewide PCMH program, Aligning Forces for Quality, the State Innovation Model, the Maine Choosing Wisely Community Campaign, and serving on MHDO's Board of Directors and Consumer Advisory Group. I list them all to give those of you, who may not know of these initiatives, an idea of the breadth and depth of what has been done already. In one way or another, these programs have acted to identify how the current system falls short, then develop strategies and programs to fix it, to achieve the triple AIM of improving patient experience of care, the health of populations, and reduce the per-capita cost of health care. Despite a lot of committed people working very hard, and millions of dollars spent by organizations, foundations, state and federal government on these efforts, in truth we find ourselves today with incremental progress, and a still fragmented, still grossly unaffordable health care delivery and financing system. Please see the "Sources and Resources" provided below for further information.

So what went wrong? Bottom line is that even with all these improvement programs, healthcare is still unaffordable for many too many Maine people. The solution is found in a publicly funded, single payer financing system which will support healthcare system improvement and transformation for all.

Please support single payer policy and support LD 1608. Thank you for hearing my testimony. I am happy to answer questions.

Sources and Resources:

See: The [MaineCare Member Handbook](#) for description of programs and coverage

See: Maine State Innovation Model

<https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/sim/#:~:text=In%202013%2C%20Maine%20was%20awarded,for%20Medicare%20and%20Medicaid%20Innovation.>

See: Maine Patient Centered Medical Home <https://www.pcpcc.org/initiative/maine-patient-centered-medical-home-pilot>

See: Maine Health Data Organization <https://mhdo.maine.gov/>

See: Maine Quality Counts Choosing Wisely Community Campaign

<https://www.choosingwisely.org/grantee/maine-quality-counts-2/>

See: [A 2020 survey by Maine AllCare](#), found 78.1% of respondents find our current healthcare system unaffordable, and the majority of respondents still struggle to access care.

See: A [recent survey](#) by Maine Consumers for Affordable Health Care and West Health which found an increasing number of Mainers are struggling to access and pay for health care including nearly 200,000 Maine families who did not seek treatment for a health problem due to the cost of care, and 100,000 Mainers who have lost a friend or family member in the past five years because they could not afford necessary medical treatment.