



THE BINGHAM PROGRAM

Testimony by the Bingham Program in Support of L.D. 1693, An Act To Advance Health Equity, Improve the Well-being of All Maine People and Create a Health Trust

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
Wednesday, February 9, 2022

Good morning, Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Morgan Hynd, and I am the Director of the Bingham Program, a charitable endowment held at Tufts' Medical Center, established in 1932 to promote health and advance medicine in Maine.

The Bingham Program has been a long-time supporter of efforts to improve community health through strategic investments in public health policy and programs, particularly those that address adverse childhood experiences and build resilience in Maine's children, families, and communities. That's why the Bingham Program is supporting LD 1693. Establishing the Trust for a Healthy Maine will strengthen public health in the state, far beyond what philanthropy can do, and will protect critical public health programs for generations to come.

In the last two years, Maine's public health infrastructure has been tested like never before. Local public health staff have been stretched beyond their limits, leaving gaps that independent community members were, fortunately, inspired to fill. Without the many volunteer groups¹ that formed to meet the public health needs of their communities, Maine's insufficient local public health capacity to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic would have been even more starkly exposed.

We cannot continue to rely on the volunteer efforts of community members to shore up our public health infrastructure. We must create a solution to the underfunding of public health in our state that has plagued us for far too long by creating a sustainable funding structure that will allow us to robustly plan for and respond to the challenges of the next public health crisis, and the one after that.

¹ Lundy, R 2021, 'Local COVID-19 task forces offer new approach to public health', *The Maine Monitor*, 7 March, accessed February 2022 from The Maine Monitor.
<https://www.themainemonitor.org/local-covid-19-task-forces-offer-new-approach-to-public-health/>

We have an opportunity to do this with the passage of LD 1693. Establishing the Trust for a Healthy Maine is the perfect companion to the one-time federal investments currently being made in public health infrastructure and workforce. Combined, these short and long-term investments create the perfect recipe for the statewide and community-based public health system our state so desperately needs.

While we all know how critically important it is to have access to medical care, we also know that unless we begin to focus more on primary prevention we will be stuck in an endless, costly cycle of treating preventable diseases. The Trust for a Healthy Maine will also make the MaineCare program more sustainable and affordable in the long run because it allows us to increase in our investments in disease prevention and health promotion.

If we do nothing to resolve the looming structural gap in the Fund for a Healthy Maine, every prevention and treatment program we care about will suffer. But if we act now, with an eye to the future while learning from the past, we can stabilize medical care in the General Fund and free up the tobacco settlement for its original intent – building strong, resilient communities that raise strong, resilient kids.

We know that a trust can succeed in Maine. Efficiency Maine provides us with a model for how to manage a trust well and achieve the long-term goals we set for the trust. The experiences of other states use of trusts are informative, but they are not predictive of how a trust, informed by lived experience, will perform in Maine. We don't need to look to other states to see if this can work - we have the perfect example right in our own state that shows that it can.

LD 1693 is about improving the health and well-being of Maine people and Maine's economy because we know that investments in public health improve outcomes for families and businesses alike. We must be prepared to address the unrelenting threats to health and productivity in our state to allow Maine's economy to thrive. We can do this by stabilizing funding for public health and protecting that funding for years to come. The Trust for a Healthy Maine will ensure more focused, data-driven priority-setting for tobacco settlement dollars, informed by people with lived experience.

Thank you for your consideration of this critical piece of legislation.