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TO: Joint Standing Committee Committee on Labor and Housing
FM: Dan Morin, Director of Communications and Government Affairs
DATE: April 30, 2021
RE: **Oppose, LD 1436**, An Act To Protect Certain Essential Workers from Infectious Disease

The [Maine Medical Association](#), the state's largest professional physician organization representing more than 4300 physicians, residents, and [medical students](#) across all clinical specialties, organizations, and practice settings presents this testimony in strong opposition to LD 1436.

Federal Emergency Management Agency officials allocated PPE to states across the country from the Strategic National Stockpile, however, supplies to Maine [were very limited](#) and as the Maine Medical Association pressed Maine CDC on behalf of smaller physician practices we were told there was a prohibition on making PPE available to for-profit entities.

Community physician practices across Maine were under significant financial stress due to reductions in patient volume and revenue. They were also forced to pay well over market prices for PPE on the private market—if they could find any—to protect themselves, their staff, and those patients who needed care in person. Distributors oftentimes turned away smaller offices when approached, instead reserving their limited supplies for existing customers leaving smaller practices facing higher hurdles in acquiring PPE because they did not have the existing business relationships or the purchasing power of large organizations.

It was a nationwide problem according to a 2020 survey by American Medical Association, which found more than one-third of the 3,500 physicians said that acquiring PPE was “very” or “extremely” difficult. Smaller physician practices reported even greater troubles, with 41% of

physicians in practices of five doctors or fewer saying that getting PPE was “very” or “extremely” difficult.

Despite the inability to procure enough or effective PPE, Maine’s physicians, clinical colleagues, and staff maintained their obligation to provide care for patients during a once-in-lifetime pandemic. Many were at higher risk for severe disease but that did not stop them from going to the office every day and visiting patients. We heard from countless of concerned members pleading with us to help them find PPE while they took all the precautions they could, knowing that if I they got COVID, they too were at risk of sever health problems or one of the fatalities.

It’ has been beyond frustrating for the independent physicians in Maine that are not employed by hospitals or health systems yet have continued to place themselves in harm’s way by seeing and testing sick patients. First, there was no PPE available to them. Second, there has been no physician office specific direct financial assistance yet to counter the severe business impacts they faced. Lastly, they were initially left out of Phase 1a vaccination efforts, and many were turned away when they approached entities asking to be immunized.

Health care workers, including Maine’s physicians have greatly appreciated the praise they have received throughout the pandemic. However, many smaller independent practices were incredulous and flabbergasted when I approached them asking them for feedback on LD 1436, believing the implication was that they were negligent in their efforts to acquire critical PPE to protect their staff, their patients, themselves, and their communities. Please vote Ought Not to Pass. Thank you.

Independent Physician Office PPE; Media Coverage

[What doctors need as Maine begins to test more people for the coronavirus \(BDN, May 9, 2020\)](#)

“But doctors are still awaiting new state guidelines on testing and their top Maine advocacy group said supplies of testing equipment and protective gear will need to increase simultaneously as more sick patients come into offices and other restrictions on care lift.”

[Maine's Independent Physicians Saw Steep Revenue Declines When Offices Shut Down](#)

(Maine Public, May 21, 2020)

"Within the first two weeks, Linville let go of one-third of her staff."

"Linville's 50 percent drop in business was a lot, but other providers saw even steeper declines.

"Oh, 90 percent. I mean it really dropped." – Dr. Karen Bossie specializes in obstetrics and gynecology at Waterville Women's Care.

Small Maine Providers Are Finding It Impossible To Source Necessary Protective Equipment (Maine Public, July 10, 2020)

Independent physicians are also feeling the pinch of limited PPE.

"We do have PPE, but it's not the right kind, I would say," says Dr. Scott Schiff-Slater, co-owner of Hallowell Family Practice.

Schiff-Slater says he has some masks, but they don't fit appropriately. He says he has requested equipment from the state's supply through the local Emergency Management Agency several times, to no avail.

"So I don't really know why the EMA is not allowed to give us the equipment they have, and I've talked to them frequently," he says.

Small Maine health care providers struggle to find personal protective equipment (NewsCenter Maine, July 13, 2020)

Months into the COVID-19 pandemic, direct care providers in Maine are still struggling to find personal protective equipment to protect themselves and their patients.

The State of Maine has distributed more than 1.8 million pieces of personal protective equipment, according to the Maine Emergency Management Agency.

State officials told NEWS CENTER Maine said equipment sourced through independent distributors is primarily for first responders, long-term care facilities, and hospitals, not private practitioners.

The Maine Medical Association said while the state has distributed nearly 2 million pieces of PPE, some have not received one mask.

"We can certainly relate to the frustration about PPE because we have tried right from the get-go to get PPE from the federal government and we never received what we should have received," MEMA spokesperson Susan Faloon said.