

**Testimony of Robin Winslow, CEO
Hometown Health Center**

**In Support of LD 1287: “An Act to Strengthen Efforts to Recruit and Retain Primary Care
Professionals and Dentists in Rural and Underserved Areas of the State”**

Monday, April 24, 2017

Senator Dow, Representative Tipping and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation, my name is Robin Winslow and I serve as the CEO of Hometown Health Center (HHC). HHC provides high quality, affordable, primary and preventive services to 9,100 patients from 18 towns in our region. I am pleased to be here today to testify in strong support of LD 1287. A few months ago, we were forced to close our Canaan site because we were unable to recruit and retain enough providers to care for our patients. We now have the unfortunate distinction of being the first Health Center in the state to be forced to close a primary care delivery site due to recruitment and retention issues. Thirteen hundred patients were displaced as a result of this closure. We offered them all the ability to transfer to one of our other locations in Newport, Pittsfield, Dexter and Dover-Foxcroft, but only 756 patients have done so thus far. Transportation is a major barrier to accessing care, which may be preventing these patients from remaining part of our Health Care Home, even if they want to.

For years, Maine’s Community Health Centers (CHCs) including HHC, have come to the Legislature to share our deep concerns related to our state’s primary care workforce crisis. We were grateful when the Legislature passed the bi-partisan Primary Care Professionals State Income Tax Credit Program, but with only 5 slots available annually, it doesn’t sufficiently address the need. Furthermore, unless you take action now, the benefit will sunset, which would be devastating to those rural communities who have been awarded and able to recruit and retain providers to serve their patients.

This bill asks for a modest, but critical increase in the number of primary care tax credit slots from 5 to 10, and restores 5 slots in the dental tax credits program. Our dentist, who practices at our Dexter site, just submitted her resignation because sadly she is moving out of state. Recruiting a dentist to Dexter will likely take over a year, but not having an incentive such as the dental tax credit program to help attract high quality candidates will make it even more challenging.

We desperately need incentives such as those offered in this program to remain competitive with other states in our region, as well as those across the country. We quite literally depend on them for our survival. Without physicians, nurse practitioners, dentists and other highly skilled providers, we can’t fulfill our mission, and can’t provide medical, behavioral health and dental care for patients in their local communities.

I urge you to vote unanimously in support of LD 1287. Thank you for your consideration and support.