



Testimony before the Health and Human Services Committee on LD 227,
An Act To Strengthen Maine's Public Health Infrastructure

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Senator Gratwick, Representative Hymanson, and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee—I am Darcy Shargo, and I serve as CEO of the Maine Primary Care Association (MPCA).

I am sharing testimony today in support of, LD 227, *An Act To Strengthen Maine's Public Health Infrastructure*. On behalf of MPCA, and its members, which include all of Maine's 19 Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs), and one FQHC Look-Alike, I encourage you to vote in favor of this bill. Maine's FQHCs, also known as Community Health Centers, provide comprehensive primary and preventive care for approximately 1 in 6 Maine people. By nature, our work is collaborative and comprehensive, and relies on important partners like those in the public health space.

As the largest primary care network in the state, the FQHCs are most often located in communities of need across this state, and they have long provided critical access points to Maine people. In fact, as the public health infrastructure has withered here in Maine, FQHCs (as well as many other agencies) have taken on some of the typical public health functions, such as prevention and education. Moreover, the health centers serve a vital role as safety net providers to vulnerable populations, many of which are at increased risk for serious chronic diseases. As the federal CDC has noted, health centers have the potential to serve "as critical partners in achieving population health objectives, promoting community engagement, and helping to meet the public health needs of at-risk communities living in many medically underserved areas." In other words, CHCs play a role in strengthening public health efforts most effectively in places where such efforts are built on a strong foundation and unwavering commitment to a robust public health vision.

MPCA supports efforts to rebuild our public health infrastructure and to create clarity and consensus about the vital role of public health within our state. We believe that the process and framework outlined in LD 227 would allow us, in collaboration with the state and other partners, to build a vision for a healthier Maine.

Thank you for considering our request, and please do not hesitate to contact me at dshargo@mepca.org if you have any follow up questions.