

State of Maine
130th Legislature
Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
Testimony of Marge L. Kilkelly, MS, CED, on behalf of Maine Primary Care Association
March 17, 2021

Supporting:

LD 510, "Resolve, To Reduce Stigma Regarding Substance Use Disorder by Requiring the Use of Respectful Language in the MaineCare Benefits Manual and Other Department of Health and Human Services Publications"

Sponsored by Representative McCreight

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, I am Marge Kilkelly, Policy Program Manager at Maine Primary Care Association (MPCA). MPCA is a membership organization that includes all of Maine's 20 Community Health Centers (CHCs).

Maine's CHCs provide comprehensive medical, behavioral, and dental care for approximately 1 in 6 Maine people. Community Health Centers make up the largest primary care network in the state, and they provide high quality, wide-ranging health care services. They are at the forefront of delivering care to rural and underserved Maine communities, and serve patients regardless of their health insurance status or ability to pay.

Maine Primary Care Association supports LD 510 and thanks Rep. McCreight, Sen. Daughtry and the other sponsors for bringing this important Resolve forward.

Community Health Centers in Maine have been actively involved in addressing the opioid crisis; in 2019 they developed and signed a *'Community Health Center Pledge Regarding Response to the Opioid Crisis'* which I have attached to my testimony.

There is one statement in that pledge that specifically addresses this Resolve:

- Address stigma through education for our own employees and board members, our communities and public figures and policymakers, and through a commitment to the use of patient-centered, affirming language in all discussions of this challenge and in all interactions with patients and colleagues.

One of the most significant barriers to accessing services is stigma - and language feeds stigma. As Maine struggles with the continuing crisis of overdoses and overdose deaths, we must look at every opportunity to provide services and support to individuals and families struggling with Substance Use Disorder (SUD). However, services are only beneficial when individuals are able to get past stigma, and other barriers, and take advantage of them.

In a 2019 HealthCity article, Former Director of the National Drug Control Policy, Michael Botticelli, succinctly outlined the importance of using appropriate language. *"The words we use*

to describe addiction can reshape perceptions and reduce stigma, lowering the morbidity and mortality of the current opioid crisis.”¹

On behalf of the patients, staff, and volunteers at Maine’s Community Health Centers, we urge passage of LD 510.

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

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¹ <https://www.bmc.org/healthcity/policy-and-industry/stigma-barrier-to-sud-treatment-public-policy>