

State of Maine
130th Legislature
Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
Testimony of Bryan Wyatt, MA, on behalf of Maine Primary Care Association
May 3, 2021

Supporting:

LD 1077, “Resolve, To Promote Equity in COVID-19 Immunizations”

Sponsored by Senator Libby

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Bryan Wyatt and I am the Director of Policy and Communications at Maine Primary Care Association (MPCA). MPCA is a membership organization that includes all of Maine's 20 Community Health Centers (CHCs).

Maine's Community Health Centers make up the largest primary care network in the state, providing comprehensive, high quality medical, behavioral, and dental care for more than 210,000 people each year or approximately 1 in 6 Mainers. CHCs 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 1077 and thanks Sen. Libby and the other sponsors for working to ensure equity in COVID-19 immunizations across the state.

If the pandemic has taught us anything, it is that health equity is far from a reality here in Maine, as COVID-19 has disproportionately affected many racial and ethnic groups, putting them at greater risk for getting sick and dying from the virus. According to data compiled by the Maine Immigrants Rights Coalition, Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) account for almost 10% of Maine's total cases, despite only making up 5.3% of the total population.¹ Black people, who comprise only 1.4% of the state's population, account for approximately 24% of all COVID-19 cases.² Racial and ethnic disparities in COVID-19 cases are also present for those identifying as Asian, Hispanic and Latinx in Maine. With results like these, it's not surprising to find that Maine had the nation's worst COVID-19 racial disparity.³

Unfortunately, the news doesn't get any better when you break down Maine's immunization rates thus far by race and ethnicity. According to the state's COVID-19 dashboard, as of April 30, of the 521,039 Maine people who have received their second dose, only 10,587 identified as BIPOC.⁴ That means less than half of the state's BIPOC population has received their second

¹ <https://maineimmigrantrights.org/covid-19-racial-and-ethnic-disparities/>

² <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/blog/how-dhhs-addressing-health-disparities-exposed-covid-19-2020-06-22>

³ <https://www.pressherald.com/2020/06/21/maine-has-nations-worst-covid-19-racial-disparity/>

⁴ <https://www.maine.gov/covid19/vaccines/dashboard>

dose. Clearly, a lot of work still needs to be done to mitigate these disparities and we believe this bill will help in this regard.

Since the start of the pandemic, Community Health Centers in rural and urban areas throughout Maine have been fighting the COVID-19 virus and protecting communities. They have been – and continue to be – frontline advocates and leaders in working to promote health equity, holding clinics in rural and underserved parts of the state. CHCs are also the go-to resource for many low-income or historically marginalized groups, which is one of the reasons why the Biden Administration has enlisted the help of CHCs across the country to help close the COVID-19 immunization access gap.

On behalf of Maine Community Health Centers, we recognize the importance of this legislation and welcome the opportunity to further support the state’s work on this issue.

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

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