

State of Maine | 131st Legislature  
Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services  
Testimony of Darcy Shargo on behalf of Maine Primary Care Association  
May 8, 2023

**Supporting:**

LD 1768 “An Act to Update the Alternative Base Year Payment Method for Federally Qualified Health Centers”

Sponsored by Representative Gattine

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, I am Darcy Shargo, Chief Executive Officer at Maine Primary Care Association.

MPCA is a membership organization that includes all of Maine's 20 Community Health Centers (CHCs), also known as Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs). Maine's CHCs make up the largest independent primary care network in the state, providing high quality and equitable primary and preventive medical, behavioral, and dental health services for over 200,000 people. Together, these health centers serve roughly 20% of our state's population and are present in all four corners of this beautiful state. They're truly the backbone of our health system.

On behalf of those FQHCs, I come to you in support of LD 1768. The top line is that this bill provides **much needed security** for health centers; in fact, for FQHCs to continue to offer the level of services they currently provide AND to serve in a transformational role (including building capacity to meet pent-up demand), both stability and predictability are essential. LD 1768 takes an important step in that direction.

Primary care can, and should, lead the recovery of our health system—especially one that is now further fragmented and stressed post-pandemic. That is why it is imperative that the State ensure stable funding support for FQHCs by establishing a regular cycle of rate adjustments, thus **eliminating the requirement that health centers carry the burden of underpayment for decades or more.**

For us, this bill rounds out a collaborative process that we've invested in for years, in partnership with OMS. We are very grateful for recent adjustments to our rates, which came for the first time in over twenty years; we also know with certainty that we cannot go another twenty years. As the State continues to transform its health care system, FQHCs need **predictable access to resources** that support increased integration of services like behavioral health and dental care. Ongoing adjustments—which consider the changing dynamics of the system and the unique issues in our state—will also support expansion and reimagining of health care models in preparation for more value-based payments, which aligns with the State's goals.

I would be remiss if I didn't point out that this bill is not an "end run" around the State or its rate setting process. We support that work and the goals OMS is trying to achieve. It is simply a continuation of our discussions to build in the necessary supports for our work. As we move into the next phase of health care delivery, let's not forget the pioneering health centers here in Maine who have shouldered some of the heaviest burden and continue to perform and innovate – we're a sure bet when it comes to both long- and short- term investment. As such, I urge you to support this bill.

We thank Representative Gattine and the other cosponsors for bringing this important legislation forward.

On behalf of Maine's Community Health Centers, thank you for considering our comments. Please do not hesitate to contact me directly at [dshargo@mepca.org](mailto:dshargo@mepca.org) with any follow up questions.

Sincerely,

Darcy Shargo, MFA  
Chief Executive Officer  
Maine Primary Care Association