

State of Maine | 132nd Legislature
Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
January 23, 2025

Opposing

LD 209, “An Act to Make Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and to Change Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Year Ending June 30, 2025”

Sponsored by Representative Gattine

Senator Rotundo, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Gattine, and Representative Meyer, and members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the Committee on Health and Human Services, I am Darcy Shargo, the CEO of Maine Primary Care Association, which represents Maine’s largest independent primary care network.

MPCA’s members are an incredible group of Community Health Centers (CHCs), also known as Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs). Together, they provide high-quality and equitable primary and preventive medical, behavioral, and dental health services for over 200,000 people (or 1 in 6 Mainers) at more than 80 service delivery sites around the State.

On behalf of the Community Health Centers across the state, I stand before you today to respectfully urge you to reject wholeheartedly a key provision in the Governor’s proposed budget, which strips away an important one-time investment in pharmacy services in Maine. More specifically, I ask you to do the right thing for Mainers struggling with access to critical, life-saving medications and re-appropriate the one-time funding approved in Public Law 2023, chapter 643 for developing and expanding pharmacy services and access to affordable priced prescription drugs for patients of Federally Qualified Health Centers.

As you know, Mainers continue to face a critical shortage of access to affordable medications, especially in rural and underserved areas where CHCs are located. As reports of challenges associated with “pharmacy deserts” grew louder and more dire last year – Maine’s Community Health Centers stepped in with a solution, which included a one-time investment of just \$4 million to help CHCs build local pharmacy programs to ensure that no one goes without needed medications. Recognizing the value of this approach, our bill was passed out of committee last session **unanimously and on a bipartisan basis**; at the time, HCIFS listed the bill as its number one priority. It was later folded into the supplemental budget, thanks in large part to members of this committee, and signed into law by the Governor in April 2024. Since then, MPCA has been in active—and we assumed authentic—dialogue with Maine DHHS/Maine CDC to get the program started. In fact, as recently as mid-December, we were told that the Department was pursuing the steps to get this program running and that funds were expected to be released in May. Now we know those assurances were mere distractions from the truth.


For as much as Maine's Community Health Centers do for this state, we do not ask for a lot from this body. And what we do get, we invest with great intentionality, care, and always with an eye to improving access. To not move forward with this program would cut health centers off at the knees and make it impossible for them to implement solutions to a growing problem that is making Maine people more vulnerable and sicker.

Maine has now gone well beyond a crisis point in its ability to provide patients with access to affordable, life-saving medications. It is essential to restore this funding for Maine's FQHCs to develop and expand pharmacy services throughout the state.

In closing, I would be remiss if I didn't also point out the calamitous effect that the Governor's proposed suspension of FY26-27 COLAs for MaineCare providers would have on our health center network. Already struggling with razor-thin operating margins, Maine's Community Health Centers are simply unable to absorb these reductions without impacts to care. At a time when health centers are already being asked to do more with less, we ask that the legislature also reverse this cut and not balance the budget on the back of Maine's healthcare safety net.

We appreciate your consideration of our comments. Please do not hesitate to contact me directly with any follow up questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Darcy Shargo".

Darcy Shargo, MFA
Chief Executive Officer
Maine Primary Care Association
dshargo@mepca.org