



**Testimony of Vanessa Santarelli, CEO  
Maine Primary Care Association**

**In Support of LD 1287: “An Act to Strengthen Efforts to Recruit and Retain Primary Care Professionals and Dentists in Rural and Underserved Areas of the State”**

**Monday, April 24, 2017**

Senator Dow, Representative Tipping and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation, my name is Vanessa Santarelli and I serve as the CEO of the Maine Primary Care Association (MPCA), whose members include all 20 of Maine’s Federally Qualified Health Centers (FQHCs). Maine’s FQHCs, provide high quality, primary and preventive medical, behavioral health and dental services for 1 in every 6 Mainers (approx. 210,000). I am pleased to testify in strong support of LD 1287, and thank Senator Jackson, and all of the bi-partisan co-sponsors for introducing it this session.

As you are all well aware, Maine has a primary medical and dental workforce shortage, which has escalated into a crisis. As you heard from Robin Winslow, our CEO from Hometown Health Center, they were forced to close a site in the town of Canaan as a result, displacing 1300 patients. All of our FQHCs are confronted with the same challenges in recruiting and retaining enough physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants and dentists to serve their patients, primarily in our State’s most rural and underserved communities. In fact, last year 18 of our 20 Health Center members reported losing at least one employed provider or recruitment opportunities of one or more providers because of a lack of National Health Service Corps Program support, and/or their ability to compete with local hospital-based practices in terms of salaries, signing bonuses and benefits.

Despite these troubling developments, the good news is that the Taxation Committee and the Legislature can pass LD 1287 to continue and expand upon a workforce program that actually works. The Primary Medical and Dental Professionals Tax Credit Programs, have demonstrated their value by offering a modest, but essential benefit to highly skilled clinicians who commit to practice in Maine’s rural and underserved areas, such as Fort Kent, Patten, Vinalhaven, Eastport and Bingham, among others. Were it not for these state income tax credits, they likely would not have moved to- or stayed in Maine since so many other states in our region and across the country offer more generous incentives to attract these heavily sought after providers. But, don’t take my word for it... several of our Health Centers’ providers who received the benefit have submitted written testimonials citing the importance of the continuation of this program which they are grateful to have benefitted from.

It takes some of our FQHCs up to 2 years to recruit a provider. For every day that goes by in which their vacancies go unfilled, access to care is impacted, as well as their financial sustainability, since providers help generate the necessary reimbursements and revenue that helps the Health Center keep its doors open to all in need of services. Furthermore, in addition to the affordable access to comprehensive, high quality health care that Maine’s FQHCs provide throughout Maine, they contribute significantly to our State’s economy. In fact, the total economic impact of Maine’s Health Centers is over \$311,000,000 annually, including \$40 million in tax revenues. Attached is the economic analysis conducted by Capital Link, which provides greater detail in this regard.

We ask that you vote unanimously in support of LD 1287 to ensure that Maine’s rural and medically underserved populations can continue to access the high quality medical and dental care they need and deserve. Thank you for your consideration and support.