



Testimony in Support of LD 1108, "An Act to Restore Public Health Nursing Services"
April 13, 2017

Senator Brakey, Representative Hymanson and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, 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/Community Health Centers). Collectively, our members provide high quality, primary and preventive medical, dental, behavioral health and other comprehensive services to 1 in every 6 Mainers (approximately 210,000).

I am here to offer testimony in support of LD 1108, and urge the committee's support. As you have heard from many who have testified before me, Public Health Nurses (PHNs) play a critical role in the communities they serve. Rather than repeat the compelling points that have already been made about why these services and positions should be restored, I would rather share a couple of first-hand accounts from health care providers from a couple of our Community Health Centers out in the field. They are better able to articulate the tremendous value the PHNs provide to Maine's children, families, and the general public.

One such example was provided by one our rural family physicians in Northern Maine:

"These public health nurses are essential in caring for new moms and babies. I have utilized them many times to help moms breastfeed, teach moms how to care for their newborns, ensure the baby is not having worsening jaundice, and ensure mothers who suffer from a substance use disorder are not using drugs again. However, since the PHN budget has been cut, I have not been able to utilize them anymore and have seen new moms "give up" on breastfeeding too early because they don't have the support at home. As a primary care office, we can only do so much teaching and don't have the time to go into their homes each week. These PHNs are perfect to help new moms in between their doctors' visits."

Additionally, one Nurse Manager in Central Maine had this perspective to share that was informed by some of her patients' experiences with the program:

"While I have not worked as a PHN, I have heard from many patients about how helpful it has been to have a nurse visit when a new mom is discharged home from the hospital with a newborn. This helps to ensure that the baby is getting adequate nutrition and gaining weight, meeting milestones. There is also a lot of education that is provided to new parents.....PHNs are also the eyes and ears in the home for at-risk patients. Having a PHN involved to help monitor treatment and care will decrease costs by potentially avoiding medical complications and/or hospitalizations. Some of the conditions they monitor are highly infectious thus their involvement is likely to reduce the spread of many diseases."

I am not a medical provider, nor do I play one on TV. As such, the Committee shouldn't listen to me about the reasons why this legislation should be passed. To the contrary, you should rather listen to the patients and medical providers who have witnessed and experienced the many and significant positive outcomes that have been achieved through the support of the Public Health Nurses and the broader PHN Program. We all urge your vote in support of this bill. Thank you for your consideration. I would be pleased to respond to questions now or at the work session.

Thank you.