

Testimony in Support of

**LD: 1787 “An Act To Improve the Quality and Affordability of Primary Health Care Provided by Federally Qualified Health Centers”**

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, I serve as Chief Executive Officer of Eastport Health Care, a community health center serving residents of Washington County with service locations in Eastport, Machias, Calais, and opening a 4<sup>th</sup> location for Pediatric Primary Care at University of Maine at Machias. Eastport Health Care strongly supports LD 1787 and we thank Senators Claxton and Moore for bringing this bill forward.

Eastport Health Care has service sites in and has provided care for over 4300 patients in 2021. Our team delivers primary care for all ages, including diabetes care, general dentistry, and behavioral health services, to members of our community, regardless of their health insurance status or ability to pay.

**LD: 1787 “An Act To Improve the Quality and Affordability of Primary Health Care Provided by Federally Qualified Health Centers”**, is a much-needed bill that addresses the concerns of Maine’s Community Health Center Network regarding plans by Maine DHHS to revise its payment method for primary care services. The current design will significantly reduce funding for many health centers, in the midst of the worst global health crisis in modern times.

To preserve the advanced primary care model pioneered by Maine CHCs, MaineCare payments for those services must be increased to reflect the current costs of providing services before the Department establishes an alternative payment model for CHCs.

- The current MaineCare reimbursement rates for services delivered by CHCs are based on costs of providing services 20 years ago.
- Rates have not been adjusted to keep pace with increases in the costs, intensity and scope of services offered.
- A solution to this problem does exist and has been implemented for another type of primary care provider in Maine. In 2019, outdated service rates for rural health clinics (RHCs) were rebased. The same kind of adjustment is crucial for the continued success of CHCs.

Eastport Health Care is opening a pediatric primary care clinic at University of Maine at Machias, in order to keep a beloved pediatric provider serving the children of Washington County. Hiring support staff has been a huge challenge because as an FQHC, we cannot compete with DECH in wages and benefits. Good people who want to join our team have been unable to because of the huge disparities in compensation and benefits. The Rural Health Clinic’s (RHC’s) MaineCare reimbursement rate is over \$70 dollars more per patient than EHC’s. And we are anticipating a pediatric population of 85% MaineCare.

Furthermore, EHC’s accountable care organization, Community Care Partnership of Maine, has ranked EHC first –the only Maine health center with a ranking of 5 out of 5- in readiness preparation for value-based care and payment system. That is, we have the quality scores and the care systems in place to make the transition. This is because we have a strong care management program and staff, including RNs and community health workers. These are professionals focusing on patient care outside of the

medical visit. Should we face additional financial challenges, those positions are in jeopardy because they are outside of the traditional and current reimbursement structures.

Community health centers, one of the few health care providers in Maine that have not received any pandemic relief from the state, exist as a fragile safety net in the best of times, while serving at the forefront of integrated primary care. LD 1787 would help maintain access to health care for Maine's most rural and underserved communities.

On behalf of Eastport Health Care, thank you for considering our comments in support of LD 1787. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any follow up questions.

Ellen Krajewski, MPH, CEO  
Eastport Health Care, Inc.

Ellen Krajewski  
Eastport Health Care  
LD 1787

State of Maine | 130th Legislature  
Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services  
February 22, 2022

Testimony in Support of  
LD: 1787 “An Act To Improve the Quality and Affordability of Primary Health Care Provided by Federally Qualified Health Centers”

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, I serve as Chief Executive Officer of Eastport Health Care, a community health center serving residents of Washington County with service locations in Eastport, Machias, Calais, and opening a 4th location for Pediatric Primary Care at University of Maine at Machias. Eastport Health Care strongly supports LD 1787 and we thank Senators Claxton and Moore for bringing this bill forward.

Eastport Health Care has service sites in and has provided care for over 4300 patients in 2021. Our team delivers primary care for all ages, including diabetes care, general dentistry, and behavioral health services, to members of our community, regardless of their health insurance status or ability to pay.

LD: 1787 “An Act To Improve the Quality and Affordability of Primary Health Care Provided by Federally Qualified Health Centers”, is a much-needed bill that addresses the concerns of Maine’s Community Health Center Network regarding plans by Maine DHHS to revise its payment method for primary care services. The current design will significantly reduce funding for many health centers, in the midst of the worst global health crisis in modern times.

To preserve the advanced primary care model pioneered by Maine CHCs, MaineCare payments for those services must be increased to reflect the current costs of providing services before the Department establishes an alternative payment model for CHCs.

- The current MaineCare reimbursement rates for services delivered by CHCs are based on costs of providing services 20 years ago.
- Rates have not been adjusted to keep pace with increases in the costs, intensity and scope of services offered.
- A solution to this problem does exist and has been implemented for another type of primary care provider in Maine. In 2019, outdated service rates for rural health clinics (RHCs) were rebased. The same kind of adjustment is crucial for the continued success of CHCs.

Eastport Health Care is opening a pediatric primary care clinic at University of Maine at Machias, in order to keep a beloved pediatric provider serving the children of Washington County. Hiring support staff has been a huge challenge because as an FQHC, we cannot compete with DECH in wages and benefits. Good people who want to join our team have been unable to because of the huge disparities in compensation and benefits. The Rural Health Clinic’s (RHC’s) MaineCare reimbursement rate is over \$70 dollars more per patient than EHC’s. And we are anticipating a pediatric population of 85% MaineCare.

Furthermore, EHC’s accountable care organization, Community Care Partnership of Maine, has ranked EHC first –the only Maine health center with a ranking of 5 out of 5- in readiness preparation for value-based care and payment system. That is, we have the quality scores and the care systems in place to make the transition. This is because we have a strong care management program and staff, including RNs and community health workers. These are professionals focusing on patient care outside of the medical visit. Should we face additional financial challenges, those positions are in jeopardy because they are outside of the traditional and current reimbursement structures.

Community health centers, one of the few health care providers in Maine that have not received any pandemic relief from the state, exist as a fragile safety net in the best of times, while serving at the forefront of integrated primary care. LD 1787 would help maintain access to health care for Maine’s most rural and underserved communities.

On behalf of Eastport Health Care, thank you for considering our comments in support of LD 1787. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any follow up questions.

Ellen Krajewski, MPH, CEO  
Eastport Health Care, Inc.