

Testimony of Deborah Shields in Support of
LD 1736: An Act to Advance the National HIV/AIDS Strategy by Broadening HIV
Testing
The Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services

Senator Bailey, Representative Perry, and members of the HCIFS Committee, my name is Deborah Shields and I serve on the Board of Directors of the Frannie Peabody Center, Maine's oldest and largest community-based HIV/AIDS services agency. I am also the former staff attorney for Harvard's AIDS Law Clinic, former Director of the AIDS Project and the AIDS Lodging House in Portland and former policy analyst with Maine CDC's HIV/STI Program.

I submit this testimony in support of LD 1736 to increase HIV testing around the state. This legislation will help Maine catch up to the National HIV/AIDS Strategy as well as align with Maine's most recent Integrated HIV and AIDS Care Plan. Specifically, this bill would increase Mainer's access to HIV testing and care by:

- Offering HIV testing in urgent and emergency care settings,
- Include HIV testing as part of standard medical tests provided for comprehensive STI screenings,
- Ensure insurance coverage for annual testing for everyone over the age of 13.

HIV/AIDS is still an epidemic. The virus does not discriminate based on gender, race, age, sexual orientation, gender identity, or income level. The Kaiser Family Foundation reports that there are more than 1.2 million people living with HIV/AIDS in the US and there are more than 35,000 new infections every year.

Only with increased access to testing and knowledge of their HIV status can people take steps to prevent transmission of the virus and engage in health care before the virus becomes debilitating. We now have the tools to prevent transmission of the virus and suppress viral replication to near zero. But clearly, people need access to testing in order to take advantage of the new treatments.

Increased access to testing will save lives and it will save money. With early detection of the virus and by decreasing the rate of transmission, there will be fewer cases, and therefore fewer costs incurred for treatment of those with late-stage HIV/AIDS. Most importantly, it will save unnecessary pain, stigma, and suffering.

I'm sure that we all want to ensure and enhance the health of people in Maine and prevent the spread of infectious diseases. Passing LD 1736 is necessary to reach that goal.