

The Maine Heritage Policy Center Testimony to Support LD 1263 “An Act Regarding Telehealth”

Senator Sanborn, Representative Tepler and distinguished members of the Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services, my name is Adam Crepeau. I serve as a policy analyst at The Maine Heritage Policy Center. I am here to testify in favor of LD 1263.

The Maine Heritage Policy Center supports LD 1263 because it would make it easier for health providers to use telehealth. The benefits of telehealth are abundant, but the most important roles of telehealth services are keeping individuals out of the hospital and providing care to rural areas of the state.

The state of Maine is projected to have almost 300,000 residents that are 65 or older by 2020.¹ As of 2017, half the population was 44.6 years of age or older, making Maine the oldest state in the nation.² Since Maine’s population is projected to grow older, the need for telehealth is vital to keeping our seniors healthy and in their homes. Some carriers do not treat telehealth and in-person services equally, which forces individuals to go to in-person consultations. LD 1263 would change this by requiring carriers to cover telehealth services if the same services would have been offered through in-person consultations.

In addition to the elderly, telehealth also benefits all residents in rural areas. Oftentimes, Mainers are required to travel long distances to see a specialist. As Stephen Thompson, an Orthopaedic Surgeon at Eastern Maine Medical Center noted in his testimony regarding this bill last session, “our patients frequently travel 2 to 4 hours one way to see our surgeons.”³ These long drives and the out-of-pocket expenses associated with day trips could be reduced if all carriers realized a parity between in-person visits and telehealth.

Janet Rutledge, a woman diagnosed with congestive heart failure, saw the immediate benefits of using telehealth. She goes through several medical tests seven days per week without leaving the comfort of her own home.⁴ The telehealth nurses at a hospital miles away monitor the data received from the equipment in her home and determine the next action based on the data. In

¹<https://bangordailynews.com/2018/03/14/news/state/maine-projected-to-have-more-old-than-young-people-by-2020/>

² <https://www.pressherald.com/2018/09/13/maine-still-nations-oldest-state/>

³ <http://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/bills/getTestimonyDoc.asp?id=59582>

⁴ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sx6THkIoY_w

other words, there is no need for Janet, or others who can utilize these services, to leave their homes.

In addition to being convenient and reducing the burden for Mainers, telehealth costs less than in-person consultations as well. Telehealth cut the cost of care for patients by 50 percent in the Chronic Care Management Program at Frederick Memorial Hospital in Maryland.⁵ Also, visits to the emergency room were cut in half due to the use of telehealth.⁶ If these services become more widely covered in the state, Mainers would benefit immensely from lower costs and the ability to stay in their homes.

For those reasons, The Maine Heritage Policy Center urges the committee to vote, “Ought to Pass” on LD 1263. Thank you.

⁵ <https://mhealthintelligence.com/news/hospitals-telehealth-program-reduces-er-visits-treatment-costs>

⁶ Ibid.