

April 10, 2023

Testimony re: LD 1040: “An Act to Require Reimbursement for Gender-affirming Care for MaineCare Members”
– OUGHT TO PASS

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Committee on Health and Human Services:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on LD 1040: “An Act to Require Reimbursement for Gender-affirming Care for MaineCare Members”. My name is Chris McLaughlin, and I am a clinical social worker with over 22 years of experience providing behavioral health services to children and families across a variety of treatment settings here in Maine. I am also humbled to be the Executive Director of the Maine Chapter of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW).

NASW ME has identified LD 1040 as one of our priorities this legislative session given the attention that the topic of gender-affirming care has received both here in Maine and across the country. NASW nationally has issued a [public statement](#) in support of gender-affirming care that in part states, “The unprecedented increase in legislation focused on Transgender and Gender Diverse youth seeking affirming health care, the professionals who provide their medical care, and the families and social supports that offer resources to them is an unfortunate indicator of the lack of understanding and misinformation that currently exists.”

Transgender individuals, especially young people, are among some of the most marginalized, oppressed, and targeted both here in Maine and nationally. They are also among some of the most vulnerable. Hostile anti-trans rhetoric has become increasingly pervasive in our society, which has direct impacts on the health and well-being of transgender people. By now, you are well aware of the statistics related to trans- and gender-diverse individuals in regards to the disproportionate rates of depression and suicidal ideation this community experiences. Research conducted over the last 6 years has documented transgender people’s experiences with personal hate crimes, concerns for their safety, and feelings of depression and anxiety. Studies have found that transgender people have a higher likelihood of experiencing depression, anxiety, and PTSD when they were concerned about politicians passing anti-trans laws in their state. Additionally, The Trevor Project’s 2021 National Survey on LGBTQ Youth Mental Health survey found that 94% of the almost 35,000 LGBTQ+ youth surveyed reported that recent politics negatively impacted their mental health. Parents of transgender youth also have fears about the consequences of banning gender-affirming care, including losing their child to suicide due to worsening depression, anxiety, self-harm, and suicidal ideation. In addition to behavioral health concerns, it is also widely documented that transgender individuals experience poorer physical health outcomes as compared with the general population due to frequent discrimination, bullying, and harassment. A recent report highlighted that nearly 40% of transgender respondents had postponed or skipped needed medical care because of disrespect or discrimination from providers. Here in Maine, we’re also seeing similar data on our LGBTQ+ youth as reflected in the 2021 Maine Integrated Youth Health Survey (MIYHS). Simply put, I believe that Maine can, and must, do better to keep our citizens safe, healthy, and well. LD 1040 is a step in the right direction.

Gender-affirming care is safe, effective, and necessary for the health and well-being of transgender people. This life-saving care encompasses both social affirmation (e.g., supporting a transgender person’s chosen name and pronouns) and medical affirmation, which allows transgender people to live in a body that matches their gender identity. Recent research found that 98% of transgender youth who begin gender-affirming medical treatment in

adolescence continue gender-affirming medical care into young adulthood. This adds to the vast body of scientific evidence demonstrating that gender-affirming care is essential for improving the mental health and overall well-being of transgender people.

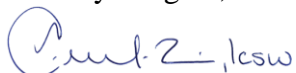
Research has shown that receipt of gender-affirming care among young people (aged 13 to 20) was associated with 60% lower odds of depression and 73% lower odds of suicidality. Other studies have found similar positive impacts on the mental health of transgender and nonbinary youth, including a nearly 40% lower odds of having a suicide attempt in the past year when they have access to gender-affirming hormone therapy. For transgender adults, gender-affirming surgeries were associated with reduced rates of suicide attempts, anxiety, depression, and symptoms of gender dysphoria along with higher levels of life satisfaction, happiness, and quality of life. While studies in peer-reviewed journals show that transgender adolescents are at increased risk of suicide, depression, and other negative mental health conditions, **the scientific evidence indicates that access to gender-affirming medical care can reduce these negative experiences.**

Furthermore, professional associations across medical and mental health disciplines agree that gender-affirming care is necessary for transgender people to be healthy, safe, and supported in who they are. Every major medical association endorses individualized and age-appropriate access to gender-affirming care. This includes the [American Medical Association](#), [American Academy of Pediatrics](#), [Federation of Pediatric Organizations](#), and [American Psychological Association](#). *These endorsements reflect expert consensus that gender-affirming care is medically necessary and lifesaving.*

Across the nation, parity in the insurance coverage of medically necessary treatments which are prescribed by medical providers who follow best practice standards of care, is a well-established principle in the Medicaid program. Gender-affirming care is routinely provided by providers and covered by insurers for a variety of indications, which may be met by transgender and cisgender (non-transgender) people alike. The provision of gender-affirming clinical services to transgender individuals is guided by the expert standards laid out by the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH), which has maintained these standards continuously since 1979. The authority of these expert standards is recognized by major public and private insurance plans and coverage programs across the country. For example, the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program (FEHBP) requires carriers to adopt “one or more recognized entities in order to guide evidence-based benefits coverage and medical policies pertaining to gender-affirming care and services, such as the WPATH Standards of Care, the Endocrine Society, and the Fenway Institute. These entities provide evidence-based clinical guidelines for health professionals to assist transgender and gender diverse people with safe and effective pathways that maximize their overall health, including physical and psychological well-being.” NASW ME believes that by enacting LD 1040, Maine can become a safe place for transgender individuals of all ages to live, work, and play while resting assured that their medically necessary healthcare services remain financially covered and intact. We believe that Maine can lead the nation in ensuring all our citizens are safe and cared for.

I want to thank you all for your work on this emotional and important issue. Please do not hesitate to reach out to NASW ME for any support we can offer, including any behavioral health representation and participation in any future work sessions for LD 1040.

Thank you again,



Chris McLaughlin, MSW, LCSW
Executive Director
Maine Chapter – NASW

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