

LD 253, An Act to Prevent the MaineCare Program from Covering Abortion Services
Presented to Maine's Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and honorable members of the Committee on Judiciary,

As advocates for social justice, the National Association of Social Workers, Maine Chapter (NASW ME) opposes the passage of Representative Javner's LD 253 and any of the bills being considered today that restrict coverage of abortion services. We believe that supporting reproductive rights is a health equity issue, a women's rights issue, and defends against the cycle of poverty. We "...affirm...that abortion is health care and that all individuals have the right to freedom of choice in accessing essential health care services, most especially their reproductive health" (NASW Reproductive Rights). Given that MaineCare is health care coverage, it ought to cover these health care services.

Disparities in reproductive healthcare access are deeply rooted in our society. Access should not be a matter of class. The rate of unintended pregnancies is more than five times higher for women with incomes less than 100% of the poverty line, leading to a relatively high unplanned birth rate (Guttmacher Institute, 2019). This is significant as all of these women qualify for coverage under MaineCare. Reducing access to abortion services will increase the unplanned birth rate for Maine women, which can lead to a decreased capacity for parenting, financial difficulties including interrupted work or education, poor health care for mother and baby, mental health issues including substance use, and interpersonal violence.

Our state currently has a mental health crisis that is particularly devastating for our youth. It is not advisable to bring more unwanted children into this situation. As social workers, we see the appalling consequences of this circumstance every day. If reducing abortions is the goal, the systems must focus on improving the quality of every Mainer's life, investing in programs that support parents and their children, such as paid FMLA, early care and education, high-quality careers, and community-based initiatives.

Social workers, per our Code of Ethics, must promote clients' self-determination by "seek[ing] to enhance capacity and opportunity to change and to address their own needs" (NASW). The decision to become a parent is one of the most significant and personal decisions that humans make. Maine's women are capable and deserving of the opportunity to make the best decisions for their health, lives, and futures, regardless of economic status, and free from stigma and judgment.

Similarly, LDs 682, 886, 887, 975, 654 and 1154 would create unnecessary barriers for any woman or family seeking reproductive health services. We urge this committee to reject all these measures and support Mainer's rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Reducing abortion is an admirable goal, NASW-ME supports person-centered, research-based practices to achieve it.

Best,

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ABOUT NASW-ME: The NASW-Maine Chapter, the leading professional social work organization in the state with over 1000 members, is committed to advancing professional social work practice. Comprising professionals with Bachelor's, Master's, or Doctoral degrees in social work, as well as Associate members from related fields, the chapter supports its members across diverse settings such as community mental health centers, family service agencies, schools, hospitals, courts, and a variety of other public and private agencies. Social workers are recognized as one of the four core mental health professions, addressing a broad range of issues including mental illness, substance abuse, and social injustice, working directly with individuals and families and engaging in policy, administration, and research.

References:

Guttmacher 2019:

<https://www.guttmacher.org/fact-sheet/unintended-pregnancy-united-states#>

NASW Code of Ethics:

<https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English>

NASW Reproductive Rights:

<https://www.socialworkers.org/Advocacy/Policy-Issues/Reproductive-Rights-Are-Human-Rights>