

Testimony in Support of LD 837

April 9, 2018

Senator Harper, Representative Gattine, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, my name is Ronald Jarrett, and I am the Director of Public Policy & Advocacy at United Way of Greater Portland (UWGP). I am here today, on behalf of UWGP, to testify in support of MaineCare expansion via LD 837.

Thrive2027 is our community's commitment to make Greater Portland stronger for everyone who calls it home. Spearheaded by UWGP, more than 200 business, non-profit, public, and community organizations have endorsed three 10-year goals that promise measurable and meaningful change in Greater Portland. These three goals are:

- Goal 1: More children have a strong start in school so that they are reading at grade level by the end of third grade. By 2027, we aim to have 70% of children reading at grade level by the end of third grade; currently, only 58% of Cumberland County children read proficiently at the end of third grade.
- Goal 2: More people have the education and employment opportunities they need to be able to live and work in Greater Portland. By 2027, we aim to have 70% of households paying less than 30% of their income on housing; currently, 68% of Cumberland County households pay less than 30% of their income on housing.
- Goal 3: More of our neighbors live longer, healthier lives. By 2027, we are aiming for a 10% reduction in preventable premature deaths.

Although access to health care plays a critical role in ensuring all three goals are achieved, we are here today to discuss primarily the third goal.

Access to care for individuals and families is a foundational strategy to reducing preventable, premature death. Specifically, access to care is a critical cornerstone of the prevention, identification, and treatment of issues connected to leading causes of death.

Yet, approximately one in ten (10.6%) of Cumberland County residents between ages 21-64 are uninsured and effectively do not have access to appropriate health care. If MaineCare is expanded, however, an additional 15,000 Cumberland County residents would become eligible for behavioral health and medical treatment.¹ We strongly believe this would significantly help the likelihood that individuals live longer, healthier lives.

Substance use disorder and the preventable deaths resulting from it have been the subject of many media stories over the last year. In 2010, there were 187 substance induced deaths in Maine; by 2017, that number rose to 378.² We are losing more than one person a day to substance use who would otherwise be contributing to their families, communities, and our great State.

¹ Maine Center for Economic Policy's Medicaid Expansion Fact Sheet, https://mejp.org/sites/default/files/Medicaid-Expansion_Economic-Impact-by-County-27Sept2017.pdf

² Sorg, M., (2016). Orono, ME: Margaret Chase Smith Policy Center

Substance use disorder and the need to expand access to MaineCare were recurring themes of the community conversations we held with almost 2,200 people when launching Thrive2027. As the report summarizing those conversations states, “Participants noted that access to health care is impeded by affordability, lack of coverage for certain services or supplies, and geographic location . . . [Therefore,] the need to expand [MaineCare] coverage was raised.” Participants also noted that a “ . . . lack of insurance can lead to more frequent use of the emergency room. As an example, one professional who works with people with mental illness reported that she sees people ‘that need case management services, but they don’t qualify for MaineCare, so the only place for medical care is the emergency room.’”³

Finally, we must note the potential impact of expansion on the economy. It is estimated that there will be a \$54 million reduction in costs to Maine’s hospitals due to fewer people needing uncompensated care (including emergency room visits) and that 1,300 new jobs will be generated with over 500 of those jobs outside of the healthcare industry.⁴

We recognize you have many priorities to balance, including how best to implement a sustainable model of coverage. We are willing to work with you on determining a long-term sustainable approach to providing health care to our most vulnerable neighbors, but we strongly encourage you to provide coverage now. Doing so can help increase the likelihood that individuals live longer, healthier lives. In sum, ensuring that our friends, family, and fellow Mainers receive access to medical care will help reduce the risk of preventable premature deaths and reinvigorate our economy.

For these reasons, we respectfully encourage you to support MaineCare expansion.

Thank you for your leadership and service.

³“The Voice of the Community,” available at https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5757120ff85082e5b52038ec/t/588b67da2994ca9f3986079c/1485531099473/Community+Conversation+White+Paper_Final.pdf.

⁴Maine Center for Economic Policy’s Medicaid Expansion Fact Sheet, https://mejp.org/sites/default/files/Medicaid-Expansion_Economic-Impact-by-County-27Sept2017.pdf