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Testimony of Katie Rutherford, Executive Director of Frannie Peabody Center
**In support of LD 718 - An Act To Improve the Health of Maine Residents by
Closing Coverage Gaps in the MaineCare Program and the
Children's Health Insurance Program**
Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

I am writing on behalf of Frannie Peabody Center, Maine's largest HIV/AIDS services organization, in support of LD 718 as it improves the health of Maine residents.

Frannie Peabody Center is the state's largest community-based provider of comprehensive services for people living with HIV/AIDS in Maine through medical case management, behavioral health counseling, housing assistance, as well as low-barrier, free HIV and Hepatitis C testing. As with many chronic diseases, access to affordable healthcare can be the difference between life and death for people living with HIV/AIDS. MaineCare has been a critical tool in covering life-saving medications for eligible individuals which, not only supports sustained health with HIV, but prevents further HIV transmission by keeping HIV viral loads suppressed.

Following a decade of advocacy from the start of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the Ryan White Care Act was signed into law in 1990 which now provides the coverage necessary to support individuals living with HIV/AIDS when programs like Medicaid are not an option due to gaps in eligibility, particularly with regard to immigration status. These and other federal programs exist for individuals living with HIV/AIDS because of long-standing bipartisan support and the recognition that access to quality comprehensive care is directly related to health and financial stability. At Frannie Peabody Center, we see the positive health outcomes and witness the successful pathway to independence that can result because of access to these services. While this is unique to HIV, this kind of model is critical to so many others who need access to basic healthcare services to support themselves and their families, which strengthens our communities.

I urge you to support LD 718 to close these gaps in coverage and ensure *all* Mainers have access to the care they need through the MaineCare Program.

Respectfully,

Katie Rutherford
Executive Director
Frannie Peabody Center