

Testimony of Katie Rutherford
In Support of LD 1687 – *An Act to Clarify and Increase Access to HIV Prevention Medications*
Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services
April 29, 2025

Senator Bailey, Representative Mathieson and Honorable Members of the Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services, my name is Katie Rutherford, and I am the Executive Director of Frannie Peabody Center, Maine’s only remaining community-based HIV/AIDS services organization. We serve over 400 individuals living with HIV in Maine and provide over 2,000 free rapid HIV tests annually throughout the state, in addition to linkage to care and prevention navigation.

In 2021, HCIFS heard from providers and community members that made the overwhelming case for expanded access to HIV PrEP and PEP at pharmacies, at a time when our communities were grappling with another epidemic and depending on pharmacists as key healthcare access points. The Maine Board of Pharmacy has since established and adopted protocols required by the law, and now two key components – pharmacy reimbursement for services and coverage for medications - are critical to finally put this legislation to work.

In 2022 I received a call on a Friday afternoon from someone who had discovered they had been exposed to HIV and was running out of the required 72-hour window to initiate post-exposure prophylaxis. They had just been sent away from an urgent care clinic that told them their policy prohibited prescribing PEP. I let them know there must have been a mistake – I knew this urgent care clinic offered walk-in STI testing and had recently started advertising for primary care, so I told the individual perhaps front desk staff misheard them or wasn’t aware of what PEP was. They were just blocks away from a pharmacy, and without a car, I let them know they were exactly where they needed to be and advised they go back in and try to speak with someone else. Minutes later, this time with greater panic and fear, they let me know they had again been turned away. Hours of scrambling to reach partner providers that were available at the last minute and pulling our only full-time prevention staff member away from a test event, we were able to guide this individual to a prescriber, and they accessed PEP with full insurance coverage at the pharmacy that had been around the corner from where they began. Had just a few more hours gone by, I may have been talking to that individual about HIV case management.

Navigating PrEP and PEP can be challenging, and it is further complicated by stigma, medication costs and gaps in provider access. LD 1687 sets the 2021 law into motion by operationalizing the adopted protocols and ensuring reimbursement for pharmacists. It will largely expand critical HIV prevention access points and ensure coverage advancing medications including long-acting injectables. These are the pathways we need to support the health and wellbeing of our communities.

I urge you to review the extensive list of broad support for this bill including medical providers, Maine medical associations, Maine pharmacists, national advocacy groups, American Pharmacists Association, and members of the community hoping to finally see this policy in action and willing to put it to work in Maine.

Please votes yes on LD 1687 and help expand access to HIV prevention across our state. Thank you for your leadership on this critical issue.