

MaineHealth

MaineHealth Member Organizations:

Franklin Community Health Network
LincolnHealth
MaineHealth Care At Home
Maine Behavioral Healthcare
Memorial Hospital
Maine Medical Center
NorDx
Pen Bay Medical Center
Southern Maine Health Care
Synernet
Waldo County General Hospital
Western Maine Health

Part of the MaineHealth Family:

MaineHealth Accountable Care Organization

MaineHealth Affiliates:

MaineGeneral Health
Mid Coast-Parkview Health
New England Rehabilitation Hospital of Portland
St. Mary's Health System

Testimony of Eric Larsen, MD

Medical Director at Maine Children's Cancer Program In Support of LD 1044

"An Act to Advance Children's Cancer Research in Maine" **Thursday, March 21, 2019**

Senator Diamond, Representative McLean, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Transportation, my name is Dr. Eric Larsen, Medical Director of the Maine Children's Cancer Program, and I am here today to testify on behalf of the Maine Children's Cancer Program and the Barbara Bush Children's Hospital in support of LD 1044, "An Act to Advance Children's Cancer Research in Maine."

Maine Children's Cancer Program (MCCP), the pediatric hematology oncology program of the Barbara Bush Children's Hospital at Maine Medical Center is Maine's largest treatment center for children diagnosed with cancer and blood disorders. MCCP has three primary areas of focus: to provide children in our region with access to the very best cancer treatments, to support the entire family through their journey with cancer, and to actively participate in research to improve the outcomes of children with cancer. This research involves efforts to better understand how cells become cancerous so as to identify ways to block these processes as well as clinical research initiatives to optimize cancer therapy by combining and comparing the newest available cancer treatments for children.

Finding out that your child has cancer is absolutely a parent's worst nightmare. In a blink of an eye your entire world is turned upside down and nothing will ever be the same for your family. I've seen this firsthand as pediatric oncologist for over 30 years helping to take care of children with cancer and supporting their families. It was my distinct privilege to be the primary oncologist for Hailey Steward who lost her 5 year battle with leukemia in September 2017. She was 10 years old when she died. Her parents, Tabatha and John, are here with us today.

Cancer is the number one disease related cause of death in children. In the mid 1900's survival for children with cancer was less than 10%. Since that time, there have been steady, dramatic increases in the cure rates, and today we expect approximately 80% of children with cancer to be long

term survivors. This remarkable improvement in outcome has been the direct result of ongoing cancer research.

While we are encouraged with the dramatic improvements in cure rates for children with cancer, 20% of children with cancer will still die from their disease or from complications of treatment. In addition, through long term follow up research studies, we've learned that a majority of survivors of childhood cancer face significant health issues during adulthood as a direct effect of late complications of their cancer treatment. With that said, we still have a lot of work to do.

While research certainly pays off in terms of saving lives and improving the quality of lives, research does not pay for itself financially as there is no associated direct revenue stream. Federal funding for cancer research has significantly decreased in the past few decades which makes it very challenging to continue to conduct this important research.

LD 1044 represents a creative and effective method at the state level to raise sufficient funds to support childhood cancer research in Maine. For that reason, I urge the Committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1044, "An Act to Advance Children's Cancer Research in Maine." I thank you for this opportunity to share my testimony regarding this bill and would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.