

MaineHealth

Testimony of Katie Fullam Harris
MaineHealth
In Opposition to LD 479

“An Act to Inform Patients of the Dangers of Addicting Opioids”
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Insurance and Financial Services
April 11, 2017

Senator Brakey, Representative Hymanson and distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, I am Katie Fullam Harris from MaineHealth, and here to testify on LD 479.

MaineHealth is comprised of 8 regional not-for-profit health care systems based in Biddeford, Portland, Norway, Farmington, Damariscotta, Rockport, Belfast, and North Conway, New Hampshire. While hospitals anchor each local health system, they also provide access to comprehensive health care services for all in need, regardless of ability to pay. MaineHealth includes Maine Behavioral Healthcare, Home Health Visiting Nurses, NorDx and 1500 physicians in the MaineHealth Accountable Care Organization who provide excellent care to our patients. MaineHealth’s members employ over 18,000 people who are responsible for providing the high quality of care that has earned our member organizations a number of national awards, including recognition from NCQA and Leapfrog.

In the winter of 2016, MaineHealth embarked upon a system-wide effort to address the opioid epidemic ravaging our communities. A group of 31 physicians and administrators from across our system spent seven months developing a multi-faceted approach to address prescribing, education and treatment. Their work was ultimately supported by the MaineHealth Board, and, under the leadership of Maine Behavioral Health, we are now in the process of implementing the evidence-based model that utilizes the expertise of behavioral health specialists combined with the accessibility and support of primary care providers to maximize the treatment opportunities for patients in need.

MaineHealth fully supports the intention of this bill – to ensure that patients are fully informed of the risks involved with opioid use. Indeed, it is standard practice to ensure

that patients are fully informed of the risks associated with any suggested treatment, including medications. And patient education is a critically important aspect of effective treatment. That being said, the requirement that a patient provide written certification that he or she has received such information is both overly burdensome and unnecessary.

As part of the work of our Opioid Use Workgroup, MaineHealth developed a standard set of tools for providers to use to assess patient risk and ensure compliance with best practice around the ongoing opioid use for chronic pain. This is defined as receiving opioids for 90 days or longer. This is the group of patients who are at risk for overuse and addiction, and thus the group that our workgroup has focused on. Included in that toolkit is a standardized consent form that clearly lists the risks associated with opioids. This was thoughtfully developed by our prescribing subgroup and is now built into our Epic Electronic Health Record which supports the care of about 85% of our patients. Consent forms such as this are considered best practice for patients with chronic pain, and thus we felt it important to build into our toolkit.

Medicine is already heavily regulated today. The administrative burdens associated with ensuring compliance with the laws and regulations governing health care are not insignificant, and they add to the cost of health care delivery. Requiring a separate signature for every opioid prescription, as required by this bill, will not ensure that patients better understand the risks associated with opioids, nor will it likely result in reduced misuse. In fact, the giant steps that you took in passing Public Law Chapter 488 will go a lot farther in addressing the challenge of patients becoming addicted to opioids through prescribing practice by limiting the amount and length of prescriptions. Instead, this bill will only serve to increase administrative burden and costs, even if for an intended good purpose.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify, and I would be happy to answer questions.