

**Testimony of Ren Morrill in Support of LD 1736: An Act to Advance the National HIV/AIDS Strategy by Broadening HIV Testing**

**The Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance and Financial Services**

Senator Bailey, Representative Perry, and members of the HCIFS Committee, my name is Ren Morrill representing Frannie Peabody Center and I am testifying in support of LD 1736 as it would contribute to crucial efforts in the fight to end HIV/AIDS.

My role at Frannie Peabody Center is the prevention program coordinator. My program offers low barrier HIV rapid testing to at-risk individuals in York and Cumberland counties. Every year, my program performs close to five hundred rapid HIV tests, but none of that would be possible without one simple thing: offering the test. Perhaps it sounds so obvious that it isn't even worth mentioning, but asking and offering is the heart of my program. If you don't ask then people simply don't test. There are a host of reasons for this from stigma, fear, or in many cases, people not realizing that they are at risk. It is this simple act of being present, and asking: "Would you like a HIV test?" that can change lives.

I am speaking to you over Zoom today from our office in Portland rather than in person so that someone will be here to offer a test should the need arise. As a small non-profit we work hard to make sure someone is always available to offer testing. HIV testing is sometimes urgent, sometimes routine, but always valuable. Many of my colleagues from outside my program are trained to offer testing to ensure the need is met. If a small non-profit can build the capacity to simply offer HIV testing to anyone who wants it, certainly large healthcare systems, emergency departments, and primary care providers can as well. The keyword here is offer. This bill doesn't mandate that anyone take a HIV test, but rather it expands Maine's capacity to offer HIV testing alongside routine sexual and reproductive health screenings.

Take it from someone who performs close to five hundred rapid HIV tests a year. The need is there. All you have to do is ask. That is why I urge you to support the passage of LD 1736. All Mainers deserve to be offered the opportunity to know their HIV status.