



Written testimony from **Mary Hunter**, Lewiston ME

Dear Senator Whitemore,

I cannot be at the hearing on LD 1397 tomorrow, but I wanted to express strong support for the concept of a universal single-payer healthcare system in Maine for at least 4 reasons. Would it be possible to have this statement included as testimony?

1. Administrative cost-saving. Author T.R. Reid (*The Healing of America*) has pointed out that we currently spend 20% of every health care dollar on administrative costs: in countries with either highly-regulated private insurers or single payer systems the cost drops to 2-6%. The difference in cost could insure every uninsured man woman and child in this country. I assume that on the smaller level of a single state similar cost-savings would be the case.

2. Making Maine a vibrant place for small businesses and self-employed people. Maine has long been a place full of small businesses, professionals who "hang a shingle" and operate solo or in very small groups, creative individuals, and people who cobble together a living doing seasonal work of various sorts. Mainers work hard and like to contribute. A single payer system covering everyone, operating on rational and transparent principles, would be enormously attractive to such folks. Maine has had various stabs at a film industry, for example. Universal single payer insurance would be a real incentive to such people to come to Maine and establish their businesses, pay taxes, and revive some local economies. Vermont is about to establish a single-payer system; it would be a pity to lag behind that state in encouraging vibrant small businesses to settle.

3. Fundamental fairness. Just as Medicare covers all seniors regardless of income, which we think of as only fair, so a single-payer system would cover a whole population. Fairness also has economic benefits: people who go to the doctor (or the PA or the nurse practitioner) early in an illness get better sooner and cost the system less money than is the case if they wait until they are so sick they have to go to the emergency room. The current system is unfair in part because some of the people who cost the system the most have no insurance at all and that is reflected in the premiums for the rest of us, as well as stressing the finances of the hospitals. A universal single-payer

system is fairer to the extent that everyone pays something, and everyone is entitled to care.

4. Stimulus to efficiencies. Competing private for-profit insurance companies have a strong impetus to be efficient, but they achieve efficiencies almost entirely by denying needed care to people "with" insurance, by refusing to insure certain kinds of people, and by imposing various kinds of caps on coverage. This is rationing of the most egregious and opaque sort. People in the most need are denied care, and people who think they are covered are not. A single-payer system on the Medicare model would ideally establish standard payments for standard services, and work to support the most cost-efficient ways of maintaining health and tending to the ill.

Finally, in a perfect world, the establishment of a single-payer system would be coupled with serious cost-saving measures: diminishment of paperwork; electronic record-keeping; evidence-based medicine; negotiation of drug prices, and so on. Not only does the rest of the developed world have better baseline health care than the US, but they spend considerably less on it.

Respectfully submitted,

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