

**Comments of Donna Galluzzo, Executive Director, Frannie Peabody Center,  
Regarding: MaineCare Section 1115 Waiver Application, May 25, 2017  
Attn: Department of Health and Human Services, State of Maine**

My name is Donna Galluzzo, and I am the Executive Director of Frannie Peabody Center, Maine's oldest and largest HIV/AIDS service organization. For over thirty years, we have provided direct services for more than 1,000 people living with HIV/AIDS. I am writing to provide comment on the MaineCare Section 1115 Waiver Application, and I would like to thank the Department of Health and Human Services for considering our thoughtful comments as we work together in the fight against HIV/AIDS in Maine.

We believe that it is not only our responsibility but also an ethical obligation for us to advocate for our clients, those at risk of becoming HIV+, and those families and caregivers who support Mainers living with HIV/AIDS.

We'd like to address some of the specific proposals that we feel would place undue burdens on the clients we serve including long-term survivors, refugees, immigrants and asylum seekers, and those struggling with addiction (including injection drug use).

Imagine that because of where you have lived, who you have chosen to love, and struggles you've faced with addiction, that you've been ostracized, dismissed, bullied, treated as less-than, called horrible names and been painfully misunderstood. Perhaps you were once a working professional but now you can no longer work. Perhaps you live in a community where no one knows who you, they only see you as someone who looks different and doesn't speak English. Perhaps you were someone who looked forward to a promising future and you now find yourself struggling to live one day at a time with no stable home, and without the support of family and friends.

Now imagine that every misstep, every misunderstanding feels like a strike against you as you struggle to begin a new life. You miss a doctor's appointment because you face transportation barriers, or maybe you are so depressed that it feels impossible to get up and out of the house. You feel ill, you've been near death before, and you take yourself to the emergency department because it's the weekend and the middle of the night and you don't want to wind up more sick than you were last time. Or maybe you finally got a job, you are trying to provide for your children, you cannot afford to miss a moment of work and you feel ill. You ask a neighbor to watch your children while you walk to the nearest emergency department, hoping that before your children greet you in the morning that you feel yourself again.

Imagine that after years of struggling to make it through each day, defying the odds to live decades with an illness that should've killed you after months or years, you have to return to work or risk losing your benefits. Now imagine that you don't have the money to pay the fees you've been charged, or that you know that as much as you want to work again that every attempt to hold down a part-time job has resulted in hospitalizations and the worsening of your symptoms.

The danger for our clients is that these penalty fees and waiver changes may simply shame our clients into falling out of care. This is the very antithesis of what we should be striving to achieve. We need to find ways to help our clients and community members thrive. We need to work with people to overcome barriers to health care, stigma, fear and shame. Living in our community with HIV and without access to quality care is a personal and public health issue.

We strongly urge the Department of Health and Human Services to reconsider the requirements of this waiver application. For far too long, those at risk and living with HIV have had to fight for their right to dignity, acceptance, understanding and, especially, quality health care. This waiver application threatens the rights that our community has fought so hard to gain. If the system is broken it will not be through blame, penalty, shame or division that we find a better way. It will be through compassion and understanding, caring and shared knowledge that we will seek to, strive to, and endeavor to do better.