



**Testimony Before the
Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs**

March 2, 2015

Sen. Hamper, Rep. Rotundo and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, my name is Ben Sprague and I am a member of the Bangor City Council and a citizen who is concerned about the health and wellness of the people our state. I am here to speak against a proposal to cut funding for the Fund for a Healthy Maine.

Rising healthcare expenses, many of which are associated with preventable disease, are causing stress, anxiety, and real financial hardship for people all over this state. Whether it is two parents sitting at a kitchen table praying that neither of them gets sick, a woman approaching retirement and wondering how she will pay for unpredictable and potentially significant healthcare costs, or a business, municipality, or the state itself wondering how it will pay for the rising healthcare expenses of its employees, healthcare costs are a major concern to people all over Maine.

The most effective way to limit these expenses is to prevent the costs from happening in the first place. That is what the Fund for a Healthy Maine and the local Healthy Maine Partnerships have been doing effectively since the Tobacco Settlement in 1998. I ask you to remember the words of Benjamin Franklin who said, "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." I'm afraid that he would think the proposal to cut dollars from prevention services to be penny wise and pound foolish.

In the greater Bangor area, our own Healthy Maine Partnership, which represents thirteen communities, has been able to coordinate regional collaboration on numerous challenging and complex public health issues. When the H1N1 crisis emerged several years ago, the Bangor Region Healthy Maine Partnership leapt into action. When the Bath Salts crisis took root in 2011, the Healthy Maine Partnership helped to organize community awareness events and coordinate response between the public health community, local law enforcement, and elected officials. Both the responses to H1N1 and bath salts are now seen as statewide and even national examples of how best to handle these types of public health crises.



The Healthy Maine Partnership is today actively involved with tackling our region's challenges with substance abuse. The questions related to treatment, recovery, law enforcement, and mental health are tremendously complicated and require a community response. Primary care services alone are grossly inadequate to handle such challenging issues.

Finally, the Healthy Maine Partnership's efforts to reduce smoking and prevent obesity have been effective. A cut to the Fund for a Healthy Maine would bring these efforts nearly to a halt, which would likely result in worse health outcomes for Maine citizens, rising costs, and further budgetary challenges for years to come.

It is worth remembering that the money that created the Fund for a Healthy Maine comes from a 1998 settlement with the tobacco industry. This is money the state receives because people got sick and often died from smoking. It should be used for public health efforts around prevention of illness and disease, which in the long run will save both lives and money.

There is discussion all over Maine right now about regional collaboration. I submit to you that the Healthy Maine Partnerships funded by the Fund for a Healthy Maine are among the best examples of regional collaboration that we see in the state. These are groups we should strive to support, not undercut. Please preserve funding for the Fund for a Healthy Maine.

Thank you for your time and consideration on these important matters.

For additional Information, please feel free to contact any of the following municipal officials:

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| Ben Sprague, City Councilor | benjamin.sprague@bangormaine.gov | 852-1405 |
| Catherine Conlow, City Manager | cathy.conlow@bangormaine.gov | 992-4201 |
| Patty Hamilton, Director | patty.hamilton@bangormaine.gov | 992-4550 |