



Senator CATHY BREEN

DISTRICT 25

Proudly representing Chebeague Island, Cumberland, Falmouth, Gray, Long Island, Yarmouth and part of Westbrook

Dear Friends,

When the Legislature reconvened in January, my colleagues and I never expected to be grappling with the consequences of the deadly COVID-19 pandemic. While these challenges may be unprecedented, the way we respond to them isn't. We will get through this by working together, the way Mainers have for generations.

“ We put Maine in a strong position to weather this crisis.”

As Chair of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, my bedrock principles have always been to be responsible with taxpayers' money, compassionate toward the disadvantaged and transparent in our process. This year, we put Maine in a strong position to weather this crisis by:

- **Growing the Rainy Day Fund** — We added over \$17 million to the fund, bringing the balance to \$258 million, its highest level ever.
- **Leaving a surplus** — We left a balance of \$192 million unspent in the General Fund to offset state revenue losses that we saw coming due to the pandemic.
- **Setting aside emergency funds** — We passed a bill allocating \$11 million to address immediate needs resulting from the pandemic.

As we navigate the COVID-19 crisis, we'll build on this solid foundation in our usual respectful, bipartisan manner, putting Maine's well-being ahead of politics. Before the pandemic hit, we also enacted bills to:

- **Fix our broken health care system** — We passed a suite of laws that end abusive billing practices and cap the out-of-pocket cost of insulin.
- **Stand up for Maine workers and businesses** — We passed measures to invest in internet access so small businesses in Maine can compete effectively.
- **Support Maine seniors** — We increased reimbursement rates for assisted-living facilities and nursing homes so seniors get the quality, compassionate care they deserve.
- **Invest in Maine's future** — We invested \$1.6 million more in Maine's career and technical education programs, which provide students with the critical skills necessary for a successful career.

Our work is far from over. It's why I voted twice to reconvene the Legislature so we could finish delivering for you. Now more than ever, the Maine Legislature must meet the challenges before us with courage and determination, just as Maine people have. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me at Cathy.Breen@legislature.maine.gov or by calling (207) 287-1515.

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I attended a dedication ceremony for the solar array built atop Cumberland's landfill. The array will power all town-operated buildings.

Investing in the future by investing in our youth

It is critical to invest in our children and young adults now so Maine can thrive in the future. That's why, as Chair of the Appropriations Committee, **I led the charge to make education a top priority in the Supplemental Budget.** We allocated an additional \$37.2 million for public schools, \$2.5 million for community college workforce training, \$1.6 million for career and technical education, and \$1.2 million for adult education programs.

In addition, Maine is starting to implement a pilot program, created by a bill I introduced, to give teachers and child care providers the tools and support they need to manage the social and emotional challenges of their young students. This program will reduce behavior-based expulsions and keep children in a safe learning environment where they belong.

While I'm extremely proud of what we accomplished for the next generation of Mainers, there's still more work to do.

Responding quickly to the COVID-19 pandemic

When Maine reported its first case of COVID-19, the Legislature quickly and unanimously passed laws to support Maine families, seniors, small businesses and public health. We approved a responsible spending package that prioritized public health nursing, Maine's CDC and senior care. We expanded unemployment benefits, made sure students wouldn't go hungry, prohibited utility companies from terminating service, and put \$11 million into a COVID-19 fund.

Since we adjourned, I've helped countless Mainers get unemployment benefits, access other critical resources and find answers to their questions. **I've pressed state and federal agencies to improve small business programs, increase access to health care, provide rental and housing relief, and support heritage industries from farming to fishing.** I've also reconvened the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee to monitor the state's allocation of federal relief funds and hear directly from industries that have been hit hard by this pandemic to find out how the Legislature can help.

As we look to reopen and rebuild, I'll be here to make sure you, your family and your business have an advocate in Augusta.

Making smart saving and budgeting decisions

Before the Legislature adjourned to reduce the spread of COVID-19, the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee acted quickly to generate a lean, sensible Supplemental Budget that paid our bills, addressed some long-standing concerns and put aside savings. We doubled down on our commitment to education for all age levels; put \$15 million toward rate increases to support direct health care providers who care for Maine seniors, people with disabilities and children with behavioral health needs; and invested in public health and child protection services to protect Mainers during this crisis. **The full Legislature passed the Supplemental Budget unanimously.**

However, we must be prepared for the economic consequences of this public health crisis. It's why we left \$193 million in the General Fund to cover gaps in future budgets and put an additional \$17 million in the Rainy Day Fund, bringing the total to \$258 million — a historic amount.



I was proud to present a legislative sentiment to Cumberland's Greg Sweetser, who retired after 24 years as executive director of the Ski Maine Association, which advocates for Maine's Alpine and Nordic ski industries.

Looking out for our seniors and their caretakers

As Mainers, we stand on the shoulders of the generations that came before us. We owe it to our seniors to be there when they need us most. In January, we started the session by increasing funding for Maine's nursing homes and residential care facilities. In light of the COVID-19 crisis, we gave further support for nursing homes in the Supplemental Budget.

To support the dedicated people who care for our seniors, we pushed to increase reimbursement rates for direct care workers. The long-term care commission also released recommendations to strengthen this critical part of Maine's workforce. Lastly, we supported a bill to give Mainers who don't have a retirement plan through their job an easy option to save for their financial future. These proposals have been carried over for further consideration.

“As the owner of a local toy store, I appreciate your willingness to answer questions and help a small business during this challenging time.”

- Paul Drappi, Island Treasure Toys



Nate Johnson, an independent kelp farmer and lobsterman on Long Island, was kind enough to take me on a tour of some of his aquaculture projects underway in Casco Bay.

Supporting Maine's small business community

Throughout this pandemic, Maine businesses have gone above and beyond to keep people healthy and safe, whether it's shifting to curbside pickup or manufacturing personal protective equipment. **Now, workers and businesses deserve our support.**

As this pandemic has highlighted, reliable, high-speed internet is essential for businesses, education and telehealth. This year, we passed measures to expand internet access in underserved areas including a \$15 million broadband bond and a law streamlining grant applications.

Earlier this year, I stood with Maine lobstermen when senseless federal restrictions threatened their livelihoods and personal safety. I worked with my colleagues to ensure farmers don't lose out when their product is mislabeled by establishing a process to correct a mistake. In the past two years, we also helped farmers grow and sell more produce by promoting local foods in schools, supporting food insecurity programs that partner with Maine farmers and incentivizing new local food processing facilities.

When the Legislature reconvenes, we'll take up measures to promote Maine-based companies and goods whenever taxpayer dollars are spent, create good-paying jobs, support emerging industries and help Maine companies get back on their feet.

Fixing our broken health care system

Last year, my bill to create a Mental Health Working Group was passed and signed into law. I co-chaired a series of working group meetings to find out how we can improve service delivery for those who struggle with mental illness. Due to the lack of community resources, we too often ask law enforcement to manage mental health crises rather than mental health professionals. The working group produced its report on how Maine can shift to a sensible, compassionate and cost-effective system, using community-based providers who have appropriate skills and training instead of the police.

In 2019, we took on “Big Pharma” and won, passing an aggressive prescription drug reform package to improve drug price transparency, create an affordability board and allow for wholesale prescription drug importation from Canada. In recent months, we adopted a wholesale importation plan and sent it to the FDA for approval. And we led the way on prescription drug reform by passing a new law to hold drug manufacturers accountable for their role in the opioid epidemic. This year, I supported a set of bills designed to put patients before profits by clamping down on abusive billing practices and patient fees that nickel and dime families at every turn.

Over the last two years, we put patient protections into state law, improved coverage of telehealth medicine, and eliminated the waiting period for children's dental insurance coverage. We took steps to ensure Mainers have access to reproductive health care, allowed EMTs to work in hospital settings, and recognized the care that physician assistants can provide. We made serious progress, but the COVID-19 pandemic proves that we can't stop now.



This year I joined the Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife for its annual cub census to monitor the health of Maine's bear population. I'm glad to report that the bears are thriving in the wild, although I wanted to take this one home!



SURVEY: I want to hear from you!

1. What is your biggest concern in the wake of COVID-19?

- Keeping your family safe and healthy
- Making sure you can pay your bills
- Supporting struggling small businesses
- Addressing racial disparities in COVID-19 cases
- Reopening the state's economy
- Protecting good-paying jobs
- Other (please specify):

2. What should Maine's focus be as we restart our economy?

- Providing direct relief to workers
- Keeping workers healthy and safe
- Providing direct relief to businesses
- Supporting Maine's tourism industry
- Investing in high-speed, reliable internet
- Other (please specify):

3. COVID-19 has exposed key health care challenges in Maine. What is the biggest challenge you face?

- High cost of prescription drugs
- High cost of health care coverage
- Surprise medical bills and fees

- Lack of medical services in our area
- Other (please specify):

4. COVID-19 has also exposed where Maine still needs work. What should be our biggest priority next year?

- Making sure more people can get health care
- Expanding high-speed, reliable internet
- Investing in education, career tech and child care
- Improving access to affordable housing
- Protecting natural resources
- Other (please specify):

5. What grade would you give Maine's COVID-19 response? _____

I appreciate your comments. Please feel free to contact me anytime if I may ever be of assistance.

Name: _____

Address: _____

Email: _____

To fill out this survey online,
go to www.mainesenate.org/2020Survey