

Senator BROWNIE CARSON

DISTRICT 24

Proudly representing the people of Brunswick, Freeport,
Harpwell, North Yarmouth and Pownal

Dear Friends,

When I returned to Augusta in January to serve my final session as your state senator, I did not expect to soon be facing a deadly pandemic and its devastating consequences. It has been an honor to serve as your senator these past four years. Even though we're currently facing unprecedented challenges, I'm confident in the ability of Maine people to work together to overcome them.

“ Thank you for the privilege of serving as your state senator. ”

During my time in the Senate, I have focused on issues that will make Maine a safer, healthier place for all of us to live, work, raise a family, and retire. These include:

- **Restoring public health nursing in Maine** — The current crisis has highlighted the need for strategic investment in our public health infrastructure. Three years ago, I sponsored legislation to restore the public health nursing service, a bill that became law over former Gov. LePage's veto. Rebuilding Maine's public health capacity is a work in progress, and it is essential in order to prevent the spread of infectious disease, protect the health of at-risk newborns, and educate vulnerable families about the value of preventative medical care, including immunizations for children.

- **Improving early childhood services** — Support in the early years of life builds a critical foundation for a healthy and successful future. This year, I advocated for the implementation of “Help Me Grow,” a program that connects families with essential services for young children who need them. A broad coalition of children's advocates had come together to support this proposal when we adjourned because of the virus.

- **Protecting the environment** — As co-chair of the Environment and Natural Resources Committee, I have worked to advance initiatives for stronger protection for Maine's environment. This session, I focused on improving air and water quality, and on designing a strategy, including incentives for manufacturers, to recycle a much bigger share of packaging material.

My colleagues and I were also able to make progress this year on improving access to affordable health care, expanding internet access, funding career and technical education, and more. There is certainly progress still to be made in these areas and others, and I'm confident that this important work will continue. It's why I voted twice to reconvene the Legislature.

Thank you for the privilege of serving as your state senator. If I can help you or your family, please don't hesitate to contact me at Brownie.Carson@legislature.maine.gov or call (207) 287-1515.

Brownie Carson

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Supporting Maine's small business community

Throughout this pandemic, Maine businesses have done their part to keep people healthy and safe, from shifting to curbside pickup to manufacturing personal protective equipment. Now, these 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 worked with rural communities and business leaders to expand internet access in underserved areas by passing a \$15 million broadband bond to send to voters and making it easier for communities to apply for broadband grants.

In the past two years, we also helped farmers grow and sell more produce by promoting local foods in schools, partnerships with food insecurity programs and new food processing facilities.

As we look to reopen and rebuild, I'm here to make sure you, your family and your business don't get left behind.



Before the Legislature adjourned to help slow the spread of COVID-19, I got to practice safe elbow-bumping in lieu of handshakes.

Supporting our veterans and elderly neighbors

We owe it to our seniors to be there when they need us most. In January, we increased funding for Maine's nursing homes and residential care facilities. In light of the COVID-19 crisis, we provided further financial support to 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. These proposals have been carried forward for further consideration.

As a Vietnam veteran, I know many of our servicemen and women struggle to adapt to civilian life. That's why I supported a Veterans' Bill of Rights proposal that would bolster resources for Maine's veterans. There is additional work to do on this effort so that veterans get the support they have earned.



With Education Commissioner Pender Makin at a Maine Youth for Climate Justice event. These young people give me great hope for the future.

Investing in our future and the next generation

Investing in Maine's children and young adults is necessary so that they can thrive and our state can prosper. This is why we made it a top priority to invest in education of all types in the state's two-year budget. We also 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.

I was proud to work on proposals that improve kids' well-being. A law I introduced last year will add mental health instruction to school health curricula. Another bill I sponsored will help make sure that more Maine children get vital early health screenings.

Coming together to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic

When Maine reported its earliest cases of COVID-19, the Legislature unanimously passed laws to support Maine families, seniors, small businesses and public health. First, we approved a responsible spending package that prioritized public health nursing, Maine CDC and senior care while growing the Rainy Day Fund to \$258 million, a historic high. We expanded unemployment eligibility, 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 worked one-on-one with Mainers to find solutions to the challenges they're facing, from getting unemployment benefits to accessing all-important personal protective equipment (PPE) for front-line health care providers. Many functions of state government have been tested to and beyond their limits by this pandemic, and the patience of Maine people has been stretched to the breaking point. My colleagues and **I have pressed state and federal agencies to shorten response times to constituent problems, improve small business programs, increase access to health care, provide rental and housing relief, and support Maine's heritage industries.** Key legislative committees have continued to meet, bringing stakeholders and the administration around the table to come up with solutions.

“Sen. Brownie Carson’s early identification of our public health system needing support, his strong advocacy protecting jobs of the staff and making sure the law change became real action was public advocacy at its best.”

— Linda Muller, nurse practitioner, and James McCarthy, retired journalist



Speaking with Major General Douglas Farnham, Adjutant General of the Maine National Guard.

Protecting our environment and natural resources

In 2020, the Legislature built on our successes from last year to expand Maine’s energy independence and encourage the hiring and training of Maine workers for jobs in the growing clean energy industry. We also passed legislation to strengthen Maine’s Renewable Portfolio Standards.

I advocated for an independent assessment of CMP’s claims about the climate benefits of its proposed power line through western Maine. Mainers deserve accurate, unbiased information on how this corridor will impact our climate, natural resources and way of life. The legislature narrowly missed enacting a bill to require a third party analysis.

We convened a commission to bring together government, industry and other experts to analyze the benefits of energy storage technology and to chart a path for Maine to expand its storage capacity, which will help lower emissions and increase use of renewable energy. The Maine Climate Council, on which I serve as one of four legislative representatives, continues its work on a wide array of topics: electrifying our transportation system; reducing carbon emissions; building resilient infrastructure in the face of more severe storms; reducing residential heating bills, especially for low-income and rural Mainers; and more.

Fixing our broken health care system

Too often the high cost of health care prevents hardworking Mainers from getting the basic medical care they need. This is true whether it’s the cost of prescription drugs, expensive health insurance premiums or surprise medical bills. My colleagues and I are working to change that.

In 2019, we challenged the stranglehold pharmaceutical companies have on our system and won, passing an aggressive prescription drug reform package that makes Maine a leader in this fight. New laws improve drug price transparency, hold corporate middlemen accountable, 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. We also passed a new law to hold drug manufacturers accountable for their role in the opioid epidemic.

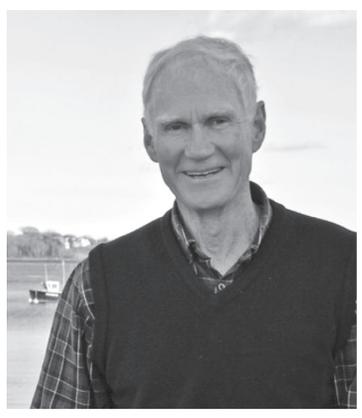
This year, I supported a suite of bills designed to put patients before profits. We clamped down on abusive billing practices and patient fees that can crush the financial stability of working families.

Over the last two years, we worked to make sure insurance companies don’t stand in the way of care by

enshrining patient protections into state law, improving coverage of telehealth medicine, and eliminating the waiting period for children’s dental coverage. We also stepped up to fill gaps in rural health care by investing in rural hospitals, funding ambulance services, allowing EMTs to work in hospital settings, and recognizing the care that physician assistants can provide. We made serious progress, but the COVID-19 pandemic proves that we can’t stop now.



Consulting with two doctors: Dr. Jay Mullen, who was Doctor of the Day, and Senator Ned Claxton, a retired family physician.



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