



Improving the health status of Maine's seasonal workers and their families by providing culturally appropriate care and services.

Testimony in Support of LD-3, "An Act to Establish the Winter Energy Relief Payment Program to Aid Residents with High Heating Costs and to Finalize the COVID Pandemic Relief Payment Program"

December 20, 2022

Dear Representatives,

Maine Mobile Health Program (MMHP) is a Federally Qualified Health Center supporting migrant and seasonal farmworkers and seafood processing workers and their families across the state of Maine. Today we are compelled to add our voice to the dozens, if not hundreds, of agencies and individuals supporting LD-3 this December. This bill is absolutely necessary to keep Mainers housed and safe this winter.

The purpose of our health center is to provide accessible healthcare to Mainers who work in industries that are largely seasonal, including wild blueberries, lobster processing, Christmas wreaths, and others. Even though their labor forms the foundation for some of the multi-million dollar industries iconic to Maine, the seasonality of this work means their households' income takes a sharp downturn precisely when heating costs are highest and the consequences of eviction are riskiest in our state. Inflation has made it even harder for seasonal workers to budget for the winter when there is little or no seasonal work available. The measures in this bill will assist seasonal workers and their families in the short term and support the strength of Maine communities overall.

With regard to housing security, patients in our program have directly relied on the emergency rental assistance program funded by federal and state initiatives to prevent evictions. In some cases, we learned that this support literally made it possible for families to remain living and working in Maine, contributing to our collective culture and economy in ways that are vital, but all too often invisible or unrecognized. In addition to the impact on our patients, this program has limited the number of people experiencing homelessness across the state of Maine. Allowing the funding to run out without further action would put people directly at risk during the coldest months of the year.

Over the past few years, patients in our program have participated in local heating assistance programs in order to keep their families warm. This winter, inflation will likely make the heating the most expensive utility and local programs can only cover so much. Seasonal workers would directly benefit from relief payments to heat their homes and create stability for their families and communities. This bill addresses the urgent need for immediate assistance and also demonstrates the importance we give to pulling together in tough times and recognizing each others' contributions to the communities in our state.



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Furthermore, we would like to voice our solidarity with those Mainers relying on this bill who do not happen to be patients of our health center. We support our colleagues who work with recently arrived refugee populations in Southern Maine, unhoused populations in our cities, and survivors of domestic violence across the state. Our hearts are with all who have experienced or witnessed the avoidable near-death and fatal tragedies that this bill is designed to prevent.

Thank you for including our thoughts in your consideration of this bill.

Sincerely,
Maine Mobile Health Program