

Malvina Gregory
Portland
LD 199

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: my name is Malvina Gregory, I live in Portland and I writing to testify in favor of LD 199.

When I first met my husband fourteen years ago he was undocumented, and had been for the past 6 years. He worked two jobs--as a line cook and a janitor. One day he developed a cough that he just couldn't shake off. It's hard to be sick when you don't get PTO and work seven days a week. He kept working. The cough kept him up at night. And then after over two sleepless weeks of coughing, his lungs began to wheeze and rattle at night. I am a medical Interpreter. I know that untreated pneumonia can be dangerous. We didn't know what to do.

I'm lucky. We know someone who's a doctor. We called for advice, and they arrived at our house stethoscope in hand for a home visit. They listened to his lungs, took his vital signs, and tentatively diagnosed my husband as having walking pneumonia. Definite diagnosis would have required an ER trip costing over a thousand dollars and a \$500 sputum test, they said. They wrote us a simple prescription for antibiotics. I am thankful for the privilege that gave me friends with prescription pads; thankful for a friend who saw the spirit of medical treatment not the letters defined by insurance companies and took the risk of writing that prescription; thankful that my husband got better. It could have been so much worse.

I worked for years as a medical Interpreter, and before that as a social worker with the homeless. I have seen many undocumented patients who have arrived for urgent care with aggravated symptoms because they were scared to get treatment. So many preventable infections swollen to dramatic proportions, and chronic illnesses that had spiraled out of control. My patients were scared of medical bills, scared of admitting they didn't have papers. I have seen how these patients later had to apply for freecare because they couldn't pay the bills that came, and the hospital was forced to assume the expense. We all pay one way or another, and the human cost along the way because people don't have preventative care is heartbreaking.

I urge you to help care for ALL the residents of our state--documented and undocumented, young and old and everyone in between. If the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us anything, it is that we only have healthy communities when all of us have good, reliable access to preventative care. Like my husband, undocumented immigrants the hidden wheels of our economy. Supporting LD 199 and guaranteeing health care for everyone irrespective of immigration status is not only the morally wise thing to do, it is the foundation of a stable economy.