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Re: Testimony in Support of LD 199: An Act to Improve the Health of Maine Residents by Removing Exclusions to the MaineCare Program

Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

I am Anita Ruff, Executive Director of the Oasis Free Clinics in Brunswick, and I am writing in support of LD 199. The mission of the Oasis Free Clinics (Oasis) is to strengthen our community by providing no-cost medical, dental and prescription assistance services to our uninsured neighbors in need. Oasis serves adults who live in Freeport, Durham, Brunswick, Harpswell and Sagadahoc County who are at or below 200% of the Federal Poverty Level.

For almost 30 years, Oasis has been a part of the Midcoast's safety net, providing free medical and dental care to those who fall through the cracks of Maine's healthcare system. Unfortunately, there are still gaps, especially for those who experience poverty, have limited literacy skills, and who bring complex lives into the exam room. Today, we serve nearly 500 of our neighbors.

Since 2019, we have had the privilege of serving as the primary medical and dental home for 242 adults who have immigrated or are seeking asylum and live in the southern Midcoast. Because we do not bill health insurance nor our patients, we do not experience the same financial pressure that our colleagues face. This gives us more flexibility to accommodate longer (or missed) appointments, arrange transportation for our patients, and provide a high level of support.

We also recognize that access to healthcare and to health insurance are not the same thing. Despite our best efforts, there are limitations to what we are able to offer our patients. When MaineCare expansion became law, we were thrilled for our patients. We knew that MaineCare expansion would bring greater access to mental health services and specialty care — services that have been a challenge for us.

While we have seen a steady decline in the number of patients we serve because of MaineCare expansion, we have seen a significant increase in the number of people who are seeking asylum and are not eligible for MaineCare. We are honored and happy to serve them as we have thousands of others over the past 30 years. However, it is unfair to exclude people who would otherwise qualify for MaineCare based solely on their immigration status. LD 199 would correct this.

I urge you to vote in support of LD 199. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Anita Ruff, MPH
Executive Director