

Committee on Health and Human Services  
Sen. Joseph Baldacci, Senate Chair  
Rep. Michele Meyer, House Chair

Dear Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee

The American Heart Association (AHA) is the nation's oldest and largest voluntary organization dedicated to fighting heart disease and stroke, whose mission is to be a relentless force for a world of longer, healthier lives. We are writing in support of **LD#199, "An Act to Improve the Health of Maine Residents by Removing Exclusions to the MaineCare Program."** The American Heart Association has a proud history of working to improve health care and to ensure that adequate, accessible and affordable health care is available for everyone.

Everyone should have comprehensive, understandable, and affordable health coverage. Everyone should receive high-quality, affordable, patient-centered health care. Everyone should have access to evidence-based preventive services at minimal cost. We believe that all Maine people, no matter where they come from, should have access to affordable health care and should be able to see a doctor when they need to and limiting access because of immigration status can harm our community health and workforce. We know that Mainers want more healthcare, in 2017, Mainers overwhelmingly voted to expand MaineCare, and today it provides coverage for more than 106,000 people and was critically important for public health over the last few years. In the past, the Maine legislature was unified in providing health care to all low-income residents, including immigrants. However, in 2011, the LePage Administration cut access to MaineCare for many immigrants. In 2021, Governor Mills and the Maine legislature passed a budget with strong bipartisan support, providing income-eligible pregnant people and children under 21 access to MaineCare, regardless of immigration status. LD 199 will remove those exclusions for adults.

We know that when we ignore health care needs today, people face preventable illness and unnecessary suffering, and it increases health care costs for our whole health care system. MaineCare for everyone with low income, including immigrants, will make us all healthier and stronger. Without health coverage, many low-income immigrants must wait until a condition becomes an emergency to get care – endangering their health and putting added stress on our overburdened emergency departments. Children's access to health care improves when their parents have health care coverage. Children's physical, mental, and emotional health are impacted by the wellbeing of their caretakers—whole families need care to thrive! Immigrants are leaders in our communities, schools, workplaces, and governments, helping to build a brighter future for us all. Healthier employees are more able to meet the demands of their job and spend less time out of work. The overall costs of missed work days, lower output, and disability far outweigh the direct costs of medical care. Access to health care also means less hunger, fewer evictions, and stronger financial futures. Maine's economic future depends on

attracting a skilled workforce to the state, and Maine's immigrants are an important part of that future.

LD 199 would help Maine address inequity and racial disparities. An important step in reducing health disparities is to ensure all low-income Mainers, including immigrants, have access to preventive care, prescription drugs, care for chronic conditions, and mental and behavioral health care. Maine experienced some of the worst racial and ethnic disparities for COVID-19 in the nation. Lack of access to basic health care to treat and prevent underlying health conditions made our low-income communities of color, many of whom were immigrants in frontline jobs, more vulnerable to the virus. LD199 continues Maine's work of improving access to health care that started with Medicaid expansion, making our healthcare system more equitable and our workforce more resilient. We ask you to vote "ought to pass" on **LD#199**. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have about this testimony.

Sincerely

Allyson Perron Drag

American Heart Association/ Stroke Association

Government Relations Director