

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

March 28, 2023

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and Honorable Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Henoc, I live in Lewiston, and I am a proud Community Health Worker. I am writing to you in support of LD 199.

I arrived in Maine in 2018, looking for personal safety from Africa; the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the country where I experienced persecution. I speak more than four languages, have a health care background, and have dedicated my career to helping others get the health care they need.

I applied for Mainecare at DHHS, but my request was rejected due to my immigration status. Luckily for me, Saint Mary's Hospital granted me free care for 6 months while I was waiting for work authorization.

When I got the work permit, I was working as CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant). In March 2020, I got sick, and my employer demanded that I resign because of my illness. Despite my health conditions, for 6 months I went without insurance. You can imagine how excruciating and heartbreaking it was.

Since February 2021, our Congolese community has lost two young people, one in their thirties and the other in their twenties who died in the interval of a year. Sudden deaths, and all because the checkup is very expensive and these young people were not eligible for full MaineCare.

I myself experienced a simple check-up visit to the doctor that generated 5 medical tests (including blood work, stool sample, ultrasound, and CT scan) and four times a visit to the doctors which resulted in the prescription of a simple medication. Can you imagine how much I had to pay out-of-pocket in the interval between October and April, just for medical prescription Vitamin D?

The USA is the world's biggest power, but health care is extremely expensive, compared to other countries like South Africa and even Zambia where medical care is free to all—the poorest as well as the richest. For a healthier country and community, I hope Maine will be an example for other states.

Thank you.