



Aspen Ruhlin
they/them/theirs
Community Engagement Coordinator
Mabel Wadsworth Center
Bangor, ME 04401

LD 199 Public Testimony

An Act to Improve the Health of Maine Residents by Removing Exclusions to the MaineCare Program

First, I would like to thank the chairs of this committee, Senator Baldacci and Representative Meyer, along with the rest of the Health and Human Services Committee for hearing my testimony today. I would also like to thank Speaker Talbot Ross for presenting this bill and the cosponsors for cosponsoring. My name is Aspen Ruhlin, and I am the Community Engagement Coordinator with Mabel Wadsworth Center in Bangor. We are an independent, not-for-profit, feminist health center that provides a wide range of services to our community, including prenatal care, abortion care, STI testing, gender-affirming hormone therapy, contraceptives, and primary care. Today, I am here on behalf of Mabel Wadsworth Center to ask that you vote in support of LD 199 to improve the health and healthcare access of all Maine residents.

As a part of our commitment to supporting our clients to overcome barriers to accessing healthcare, we created a Client Advocate position in 2019. Part of that role includes helping with insurance enrollment, including with MaineCare. I held that position for three years, and still currently oversee much of that work. Because of this, I am uniquely situated to speak to the benefits to an individual's wellbeing that having access to healthcare can have. I have had the pleasure to watch the health of countless members of our community improve because of their newfound access to healthcare, particularly primary care and preventative services that keep patients out of our overburdened emergency departments.



Unfortunately, there is one group of people in our community that has been kept from the human right to healthcare here in Maine: immigrants. Unjust and cruel restrictions on MaineCare have kept our newer neighbors from accessing healthcare that not only benefits the health of individuals, but of entire communities. These restrictions are not based in saving money; CDC research shows that lack of access to healthcare reduces worker productivity and results in profit loss.¹ Further, people just deserve access to healthcare. Yes, this is the smart thing to do in terms of finances and strengthening our work force, but more importantly it is the right thing to do.

In the Client Advocate role at Mabel Wadsworth Center, there was never anything more frustrating than working with a client who didn't qualify for MaineCare because they were an immigrant and who didn't make enough money to get a plan through the Marketplace. With these current barriers to accessing MaineCare, it is like we don't expect immigrants to be people who can break a bone, get cancer, or have a stroke. It is like we don't expect immigrants to be people. It is cruel.

Today, Mabel Wadsworth Center is urging you to vote in support of LD 199. We are not asking this simply because it makes economic sense. We believe that all Mainers deserve access to healthcare, and improving access to MaineCare is one important step to accomplish this. Thank you.

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/workplacehealthpromotion/model/evaluation/productivity.html>

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