

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

My name is Sarah Harden, I live in Portland and am here today to testify in favor of LD 199. I am a licensed clinical social worker based in Cumberland County and serving other counties of Maine through telehealth. I have twelve years experience working for Latinx families. I will testify this afternoon to the ways LD 199 will strengthen our communities across the state by providing greater access to mental healthcare for immigrants. It is essential because:

***Everyone deserves the benefit of healing both their body and mind.** Immigrants obtain mental healthcare a lot less; one of the main reasons is the lack of access to health insurance. In my practice, we have to cobble together resources to make affordable and holistic mental healthcare a reality for low-income and immigrant families. But there can be delays, which are costly when there is a crisis and someone needs life-saving interventions. Throughout the pandemic and from the safety of my own home and computer, I have conducted therapy sessions with clients labeled “essential workers” who labored every day through fear and stress, worried they were going to contract COVID in their factory or seafood processing jobs. They witnessed co-workers losing their lives or losing their housing, all the while not being able to care for their physical health due to a lack of access to healthcare. More than just working bodies, they merit the opportunities other Mainers have for treating this trauma. I personally do not know where I would be today without having had access to mental health resources.

Mainers with immigration histories contribute so much to our state- they are leaders and changemakers, spiritual healers, teachers and farmworkers. Many have endured psychological trauma, either in their home country or as a result of immigration-related stressors. Mental health care addresses these wounds and supports immigrant families settling into new communities and strengthens their ability to more fully contribute and enjoy their lives.

Additionally, without health insurance, you don’t have much of a choice of provider. People benefit from finding the right clinician to offer them culturally and linguistically appropriate crisis and long-term therapy. These and other services may mitigate immediate safety risks and support them over time. Getting the best care is about creating a good fit by building a trusting relationship which allows people to feel safe in asking for and getting the help they need. Having insurance opens the door to this level of care.

***Providing access to mental healthcare is good for everyone.** The ability to resource mental health providers means the use of fewer emergency services, healthier families and communities, and a stronger workforce. Untreated mental health can lead to unnecessary disability, unemployment, poor physical health outcomes later in life, suicide, and poor quality of life, while emotional support strengthens healthy families and relationships and produces a healthy society. The economic cost of untreated mental illness is estimated at more than 100 billion dollars each year in the United States. (NAMI, 2020) The ways we care for each other says much about the kind of society we wish to live in.

LD 199 is life-affirming legislation that would make the difference between creatively finding loopholes in our current system of care so that someone *might* gain access to the care they need, and

leading with best practices in the state of Maine. It is the *distinction* between a healthcare system that can only offer short-term emergency mental healthcare and providing holistic, consistent care and connection for safer and stronger communities. Thank you.