

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Nicole Clegg and I serve as the Senior Vice President of Public Affairs at Planned Parenthood of Northern New England and am pleased to submit testimony in support of LD 199.

Planned Parenthood of Northern New England provides comprehensive reproductive and sexual health care to more than 14,000 people in Maine at four health centers located in Biddeford, Portland, Sanford and Topsham. People turn to us for affordable, high-quality care including wellness exams, birth control, disease testing and treatment, cancer screenings, abortion care as well as a variety of primary care services. We see everyone who comes to us regardless of ability to pay, and in a typical year, we provide more than \$4 million in free and discounted care to our communities in Maine.

As a mission driven health care provider, we fundamentally believe everyone should be able to get affordable, high quality sexual and reproductive health care in their communities, no matter where they live or how much money they make and we advocate for policies that help make this vision a reality.

LD 199 closes a significant gap in Maine's Health Care system, extending access to MaineCare to otherwise ineligible populations of New Mainers who have been unjustly exempted from participation in state health care programs for more than a decade due to the actions of the LePage administration. While Maine's immigrant population is small relative to that of the country as whole, its impact is significant with immigrant households contributing nearly 450 million dollars in federal, state and local taxes annually and helping to fill key frontline roles in our economy from food production to health care.

Despite these contributions to our economy many New Mainers are ineligible for assistance from the very systems their work and tax dollars help to support. This leaves a significant portion of the New Mainer population in a dilemma familiar to many to Mainers prior to the expansion of Medicaid. Left without health coverage, low-income New Mainers are often unable to access diagnostic or preventative care and are instead effectively forced to wait until a condition becomes an emergency to seek help a dynamic which can dramatically increase the overall cost of care and endanger not only their own health but the health of the public as whole as well as putting added stress on our already overburdened emergency care systems.

In 2017, Question 2 passed with the approval of nearly 60% of the electorate, extending access to Medicaid for more 70,000 Mainers and in 2021, the 130th Legislature worked with Governor Mills to extend this expansion to a segment of the New Mainer population by eliminating the

the New Mainer exclusion for pregnant persons and allowing New Mainers under 21 to qualify for CHIP. The combined impact of these expansions on public health cannot not be overstated, improving health outcomes both directly for those newly eligible, and indirectly for all Mainers through improved population health and renewed support for health care providers—especially those in rural areas.

Now, the time has come to complete the job and fully eliminate this coverage gap, rectifying an injustice of the past and building a healthier, more prosperous future for all Mainers. By allowing immigrants 21 and older who are ineligible for federal coverage programs to access MaineCare, LD 199 would help to alleviate an inequity that currently spans generations and in so doing improve the health and lives of not just those directly impacted by its coverage expansion but also their families, communities and the state as a whole. For all of these reasons, I strongly urge you to vote to pass LD 199.