



**Testimony of Jena Jones on Behalf of  
the Maine Council on Aging to the Committee on  
Health and Human Services**

**In Favor of LD 199 – An Act to Improve the Health  
of Maine Residents by Removing Exclusions to the  
MaineCare Program**

Submitted on March 28, 2023

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

My name is Jena Jones, and I am the Director of Policy and Advocacy at the Maine Council on Aging (MCOA). The MCOA is a broad, multidisciplinary network of over 135 organizations, businesses, municipalities, and older community members working to ensure we can all live healthy, engaged and secure lives with choices and opportunities as we age at home and in community settings. I am testifying in favor of LD 199.

At the MCOA, when we advocate for our collective ability to age positively with autonomy and security, we mean everyone in Maine, including those who have immigrated to our great state. Crucial to that ability is access to quality healthcare services when and where they are needed. In the past, this was common practice but cuts in 2011 saw this coverage severely decreased and as a result many New Mainers lost access to affordable care.

Immigrants are tax-paying workers who contribute hundreds of millions of dollars in state and local taxes annually<sup>1</sup>, playing pivotal roles in driving our workforce and our economy. According to the American Immigration Council, Maine's growing immigrant population includes around 30,000 workers as of 2018, many working in healthcare support positions<sup>2</sup>. This means that supporting the health of New Mainers supports growing a direct care workforce in dire need of assistance.

A healthy workforce is a productive one, and access to healthcare coverage ensures that all Mainers can obtain the health services they need. However, when denied access to coverage, many people wait until an illness or injury negatively impacts their daily lives before seeking the most expensive care in an emergency department. These late-stage access points are costly to our systems and further stress our workforce challenges.

The Governor's Biennial Budget has offered additional support to provide access to healthcare by offering coverage to income-eligible pregnant people and children under 21 years of age regardless

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<sup>1</sup> (American Immigration Council, 2020)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

of immigration status, however this neglects many older New Mainers who also require access to services. The passage of LD 199 would close those gaps.

The process of expanding MaineCare services is already well underway and supported by Mainers, who turned out in 2017 to vote in favor of expansion. Not only is the increase in coverage right for the wellbeing of all Mainers, regardless of immigration status, it is ultimately a method to control surging costs in healthcare spending.

When we ensure access to necessary healthcare services, we simultaneously decrease health disparities across our state which will have positive effects on our already stressed system<sup>3</sup>. When people have access to routine healthcare, we see earlier diagnoses for conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, and cancer in addition to better overall management of chronic conditions.

This bill provides necessary support for those in need and it helps strengthen Maine's economy by aiding our workforce and decreasing healthcare spending. I urge this Committee to support the efforts to LD 199 to ensure all Mainers, regardless of immigration status, have access to quality, affordable healthcare services.

Thank you.

Jena Jones

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<sup>3</sup> (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, n.d.)