

**Maine Access Immigrant Network 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**

Good afternoon Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Sarah Lewis and I am a director at Maine Access Immigrant Network (MAIN), a nonprofit that bridges access to health and social services for immigrants and refugees in Portland Maine. Our organization works to build a stronger multicultural community in Portland, and to address health literacy, health care enrollment, and coordination of health care benefits and non-clinical care. MAIN provides resource and referral information that is culturally and linguistically appropriate in English, Arabic, Lingala, Portuguese, Somali, Swahili, Kurdish, and French to ensure equal access to programs and services for new Mainers from around the world.

Our Community Health Workers (CHWs) have enormous experience supporting immigrants with accessing health care coverage and care. Based on those experiences, we are testifying in enthusiastic support of LD 199 today.

As an immigrant-led organization with deep roots connecting us to multiple immigrant communities, we have witnessed over and over the challenges experienced by individuals and families who lack health care coverage. Just like all Mainers, those who are immigrants are focused on creating a home for their families, contributing to their communities through work and volunteering, and engaging in everyday activities like going to school, being part of a faith community, and connecting with friends and neighbors.

And just like all other Mainers, they need access to basic health care like screenings, vaccines, annual physicals, and medication for chronic conditions like diabetes, high blood pressure, and asthma. Sometimes they need care for more serious issues like cancer, a heart attack, or broken bones. When people have access to preventive care, they are less likely to see issues like cancer or heart disease go untreated until they become fatal.

Sadly, too often, our CHWs are helping people piece together care through emergency departments, hospital free care, or clinics. But that care is usually for an emergency or more serious health issues rather than for preventive care. It's frustrating and heartbreaking to help someone navigate treatment for a really bad illness or disease that could have been detected earlier if the patient had access to preventive care. For low-income immigrants, MaineCare can literally be lifesaving, but many adults in our community are excluded from coverage for years.

During the pandemic, we saw how denying some members of our community access to basic health care resulted in some of the worst racial health disparities in the nation. MAIN has worked closely with DHHS and other partners to create community responses to improve public health outcomes for immigrant populations. But we all know that the best intervention and investment would be to make sure all low-income Mainers have access to MaineCare. It's a clear solution that will have long-term benefits for the people gaining coverage, for our hospitals and clinics, and for our collective public health.

For all these reasons and more, we urge you to pass LD 199. Thank you.