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• **SUPPORT** Maine Physicians • **ADVANCE** the quality of medicine in Maine • **PROMOTE** the health of all Maine people

TO: Joint Committee on Health and Human Services

FROM: Mikenzie Dwyer, Public Health & Government Affairs Associate

DATE: March 28, 2023

SUPPORT – [LD 199](#); An Act to Improve the Health of Maine Residents by Removing Exclusions to the MaineCare Program

Good afternoon, Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and the distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Mikenzie Dwyer, I am the Public Health and Government Affairs Associate with the Maine Medical Association and I live in Windham. The MMA appreciates the opportunity to present the following comments in support of LD 199. This bill will ensure our Maine residents can access the care they need and will work to better our health equity, diversity and inclusion efforts in the State.

The Maine Medical Association is Maine's largest professional association representing over 4,300 current and future physicians from all specialties in all practice settings.

Investing in public health is one of MMA's core priorities as it ensures the population is healthy and reduces strain on our healthcare system by preventing health issues. LD 199 would invest in the public health of Maine residents and support, promote, and advance health equity.

Currently children under the age of 21 and pregnant people who are not otherwise eligible for federal Medicaid due to their immigration status are eligible to receive MaineCare coverage. However, individuals who await permanent status decision, Asylum status determination, or who have Lawful Permanent Resident for less than 5 years are not eligible for MaineCare.

Federal legal barriers, such as the 5 year waiting period, have been linked to high rates of uninsured status and poverty for immigrant populations. Immigrants, particularly those who are noncitizens, have substantially lower rates of health care utilization and lower mean health care expenditures than citizens who are naturalized or native born¹². Low-income immigrants are much more likely to lack health insurance than similarly poor native-born citizens, because of

¹ Stimpson JP, Wilson FA. Medicaid expansion improved health insurance coverage for immigrants, but disparities persist. Health Aff (Millwood). 2018;37(10):1656-1662. doi:10.1377/hlthaff.2018.0181

² Stimpson JP, Wilson FA, Su D. Unauthorized immigrants spend less than other immigrants and US natives on health care. Health Aff (Millwood). 2013;32(7):1313-1318. doi:10.1377/hlthaff.2013.0113

The Maine Medical Association is a statewide volunteer organization formed in 1853, serving more than 4,300 current and future Maine physicians in all clinical specialties, organizations, and practice settings.

the shortfalls in their access to public and private job-based health insurance. As a result, immigrants are less likely to see a physician and have less access to healthcare services overall³.

Immigrants are essential to Maine's communities and are an immense asset to our health care system. On the whole, foreign-born residents create a net benefit to the United States by paying more into the system than they receive in government-funded medical benefits. Additionally, they fill crucial roles in our health care system workforce – particularly vital during the COVID-19 pandemic. Inclusive policies, such as the one currently before you, could do even more for our health care system and support Maine residents.

Maine's physicians are dedicated to addressing the health needs of our communities and working to address the social determinants of health to improve overall health outcomes. Immigration can be considered a social determinant of health⁴ in part because of the role immigration status has on their ability to obtain health benefits and services. We urge the committee to vote ought to pass on this important piece of legislation for these reasons.

We thank the committee for considering our comments today and welcome any questions you may have,

Sincerely,
Mikenzie Dwyer
(mdwyer@mainemed.com)

³ Ku, Leighton., Jewers, Mariellen. Health Care for Immigrant Families; Current Policies and Issues. 2013. Migration Policy Institute, George Washington University. [chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/COI-HealthCare.pdf](https://www.migrationpolicy.org/pubs/COI-HealthCare.pdf)

⁴ <https://www.publichealthpost.org/research/immigrant-health-is-public-health/>