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**Statement of Hafsa Ahmed
New Mainers Public Health Initiative
To the Joint Standing Committee On Health and Human Services**

Speaking in support of: LD 1955, An Act to Require Hospitals and Hospital-affiliated Providers to Provide Financial Assistance for Medical Care

January 17th, 2024

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Hafsa Ahmed and I live in Auburn, Maine. I am providing testimony in support of LD 1955, "An Act to Require Hospitals and Hospital-affiliated Providers to Provide Financial Assistance for Medical Care."

I am a Community Health Worker at New Mainers Public Health Initiative, which serves as the leading health related, community-based organization directly serving the needs of the immigrant and refugee youth and their families in Maine.

Accessible health care is crucial. Without it, people may delay seeking medical attention, leading to worsening of existing conditions and more health problems.

Some people choose not to visit the doctor due to high costs. When they finally seek help, their health has declined, or they are in an emergency. The lack of accessibility to the free care program for those who qualify, places people in a difficult position where they are forced to choose between their health and other responsibilities. For those who seek out health care without free care, the result is often accumulating debt, putting them at a disadvantage and setting them back in life. It's happening here in Maine where nearly half of all Mainers have medical debt in their household. LD 1955 would increase the federal poverty level limits to 200% so that more people can qualify for free care and therefore avoid both medical emergencies and medical debt. The bill would also make the program more accessible for those who speak other languages, allowing for more inclusion of those who are already eligible.

Thank you and I urge you to support LD 1955 to ensure the well-being of our community.



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