

**Statement of Gracia Bintu
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 honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Gracia Bintu. I am providing this 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. In my work, I see countless clients who are heavily affected by the high cost of medical bills.

Most New Mainers would prefer to use preventive care in order to prevent and detect certain chronic diseases, but the cost of this care and the lack of access to affordable insurance makes this process almost impossible.

I work with a community member who suffers from fibroids, a condition that requires multiple hospital visits. Although she has private insurance through her job, the cost of the care she received in the past three months has left her with medical debt totaling \$16,000. This has damaged her morale and led to certain stress-related illness. Social and economic situations are determining factors in health, and the high cost of medical care is one of them, resulting in a circle of illnesses linked to stress.

Although this client has insurance, many New Mainers do not. However, this story does illustrate how medical debt can lead to greater illness. LD 1955 would help many New Mainer's avoid medical debt by ensuring greater access to hospital free care programs which will lead to more New Mainers being able to access the routine, preventative, medically necessary care I mentioned earlier in my testimony.

It is for these reasons that I urge you to support LD 1955. Thank you for your time.