

Testimony in Opposition to LD 429, “An Act to Track Certain Information Regarding and Seek Federal Reimbursement for Medical Care Provided to Asylum Seekers.”

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Good Afternoon Senator Ingwerson, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is James Myall and I am a Policy Analyst at the Maine Center for Economic Policy. I am here before you to testify in opposition to LD 429, “An Act to Track Certain Information Regarding and Seek Federal Reimbursement for Medical Care Provided to Asylum Seekers.” MECEP opposes LD 429 because it would put additional reporting requirements on health care providers that would likely result in New Mainers putting their health at risk by opting not to go to the hospital.

By requiring hospitals to ask patients about their immigration status, LD 429 requires health care professionals to collect information that is irrelevant to their primary responsibility of delivering medical care. Moreover, simply the act of collecting the information could put patients at risk.

The Trump Administration has revoked previous assurances that Immigration and Customs Enforcement officers would not target health care facilities for deportation operations, and this bill would reinforce the perception that going to seek medical care risks an encounter with ICE. This is not only a risk for Mainers without a documented immigration status. There have been several high-profile cases of Americans with Temporary Protected Status, non-resident visas (such as student visas) and even Legal Permanent Residents being detained by ICE.

What’s more, this bill explicitly names Mainers claiming asylum in the United States, who have additional reason to be wary of disclosing their immigration status when seeking medical care. Anyone who plans to apply for legal permanent resident status in the future must ensure that they are not deemed to become a “public charge” to the United States. Use of charity care in hospitals and enrollment in MaineCare services are not considered in determining “public charge” status, but in 2019 the last Trump Administration attempted to include non-cash benefits like these in its calculation. In a time of great uncertainty for

New Mainers, it seems likely to same would consider it a risk to their future immigration status if they thought their use of hospital care would be recorded under this bill.¹

Finally, I want to address the provision of the bill which would seek federal reimbursement for health care costs incurred for services provided to asylum-seekers. While MECEP supports the idea of the federal government providing more support to people seeking asylum, to the best of my knowledge, there is no procedure for the federal government to provide such reimbursement to states. It's also worth noting that Florida has a similar requirement for hospitals to collect data on the immigration status of patients. It found that undocumented immigrants in Florida accounted for less than one percent of all patients, and likely an even smaller share of hospital costs.² Meanwhile, surveys show that even immigrants with US Citizenship are less likely to seek medical care as a result of the law.³

LD 429 would add administrative requirements for health care providers, worsen a climate of fear for New Mainers, all in the service of collecting data on what is likely to be a small cost that the federal government will not reimburse Maine or our hospitals for. For those reasons, I urge you to vote "ought not to pass" on the legislation.

¹ Drishti Pillai and Samantha Artiga, "Potential Impacts of New Requirements in Florida and Texas for Hospitals to Request Patient Immigration Status." *KFF*. Aug 26, 2024. <https://www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/issue-brief/potential-impacts-of-new-requirements-in-florida-and-texas-for-hospitals-to-request-patient-immigration-status/>

² Alexis Tsoukalas, "Florida's Public Dashboard on Health Care Costs is Misleading." *Florida Policy Institute*. April 18, 2024. <https://www.floridapolicy.org/posts/floridas-public-dashboard-on-health-care-costs-is-misleading>

³ "Survey Shows Immigrants in Florida – Even US Citizens – Are Less Likely to Seek Health Care After Passage of Anti-Immigrant Laws." *The Conversation*. Mar 12, 2025. <https://theconversation.com/survey-shows-immigrants-in-florida-even-us-citizens-are-less-likely-to-seek-health-care-after-passage-of-anti-immigrant-laws-248952>