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THE MAINE SENATE
131st Legislature

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**Testimony in support of
LD 199, "An Act to Improve the Health of Maine Residents by Removing Exclusions to the
MaineCare Program"**

**Senator Peggy Rotundo
March 28, 2023**

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer and members of the Committee On Health and Human Services, my name is Peggy Rotundo and I represent Senate District 21, the City of Lewiston. I am here today to testify in support of LD 199, "An Act to Improve the Health of Maine Residents by Removing Exclusions to the MaineCare Program".

Immigrants have long been essential to the fabric of Maine – our economy, our culture, our communities. Those who call Maine home are just as vital to our future as those who were born here or who moved here from other states. Their health and wellbeing matters just as much as the health and wellbeing of all Maine residents. That is why I am proud to cosponsor LD 199 because all Mainers with low incomes, regardless of their immigration status, should have access to MaineCare.

When people have access to a full range of health care, including preventive care, they have better health outcomes, are more likely to maintain employment, and can maintain a healthy and productive life. That is why so many Mainers supported expanding Medicaid in 2017. Sadly, many Mainers who are immigrants lack health care coverage because of harmful exclusions in the MaineCare program. While these exclusions are rooted in exclusions at the federal level, we can make a choice to ensure that all low-income Mainers have access to MaineCare regardless of their immigration status – as we did prior to 2011. Making this humane and equitable change will help improve the health of a critical part of our workforce, reduce the reliance of emergency rooms to provide care that could have been prevented, reduce health disparities, and improve our overall public health.

It is also in our economic interest to ensure immigrants in Maine can access health care so they can remain active in our workforce. As legislators, we often hear about the challenges of maintaining an adequate workforce to provide care to older Mainers and to Mainers with certain disabilities. We are asked to support efforts to increase our childcare workforce and address worker shortages in essential industries in our economy, including healthcare, food production, and service industries. Immigrants are helping to address those challenges in communities like mine and in others across our state.

The economic benefits immigrants provide Maine go beyond filling needed jobs. In Maine's second congressional district in 2017, immigrants were 2.7% of the population.¹ They had \$290.2 million dollars in spending power and paid \$97 million in total taxes with \$34.5 million going to state and local taxes.² Statewide data from 2019 shows Mainers who are immigrants had \$1.2 billion in spending power and paid \$151.9 million in state and local taxes.³

Mainers who are immigrants are an important part of my hometown and communities across our state. They are our neighbors, they go to school with our children, they are our caregivers, they are our coworkers, and they are our local business owners. There is no reason immigrants who have made Maine home should be excluded from MaineCare. By supporting LD 199, we will make Maine a healthier and more equitable place. It's good for us all.

¹ <https://www.newamericaneconomy.org/locations/maine/maine-district-2/>

² Ibid.

³ <https://map.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/locations/maine/>