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Remarks: LD 199 Testimony

Good afternoon *Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services.*

My name is Crystal Cron and I'm the founding director of Presente! Maine, where we work to empower displaced indigenous and afro-Latinx peoples of Maine through survival programs, community power building, cultural celebration, and transformative healing practice. Today I am speaking about the need to close the remaining coverage gap in MaineCare for adult immigrants through LD 199.

Immigrants have been contributing to the strength and vitality of Maine for centuries. They have resettled here with hopes and dreams of building a new life for themselves, and of investing in the communities they now call home. And they *have* invested.

They've breathed new life into towns and Main Streets with shuttered doors and dusty, old for lease and out of business signs, replacing them with stores, restaurants, shops and essential services.

They've expanded our world view and enriched our communities with new stories, traditions, cultures and ways of understanding, preparing our next generation to be more informed and engaged global citizens.

*And*, they've become the driving force behind Maine's most lucrative industries: agriculture, lobster processing, construction, tourism and hospitality, and providing care in our healthcare system, bringing billions of dollars into our local economy every year and taking care of Maine people.

During the pandemic, our communities were called to keep working on the frontlines. Immigrant workers were deemed essential in keeping these critical industries running. Many of them put their lives on the line to keep businesses profitable, and tragically suffered the consequences when they got ill and had no way to afford treatment.

That's not fair or right. That is not good reciprocity, and it's not good business.

If we want strong communities, we need healthy people. If we want the benefits of a growing and eager workforce, we must care for the workers. People are not separate from the work they do. We must not work people to the bone, and refuse to offer them even the most basic

services...services that are afforded to other residents of Maine. We must not rely on people in times of collective crisis and abandon them when they need our support.

People who are able to access healthcare regularly, instead of only in an emergency, are not only more likely to seek and receive treatment early and often, but they are also healthier for not carrying around the chronic stress and fear of not being able to get treatment. That means healthier individuals, healthier families, healthier workplaces and communities.

I'm ready for us to put to use the lessons we've learned since the pandemic about collective health and wellness. I'm ready for us to live our values of caring for all Maine people – If you've worked thousands of hours in a lobster plant, or in the blueberry fields, or in packing potatoes, aren't you a Mainer? The health of one is the health of us all, and we *all* reap the benefits when our communities are cared for.

Up until a few years ago, these exclusions did not exist. That shows that we as citizens of Maine already value health, life, access, and community. LD 199 is Governor Mills and the legislature's chance to affirm that, and restore coverage for all those who have been fighting so hard to bring Maine, a stronger and more vibrant Maine, into the future.