



**Testimony of the  
Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal  
Populations**

***In Support of LD 199,***

**“An Act to Improve the Health of Maine Residents by Removing exclusions to  
Mainecare program”**

Tuesday, March 28, 2023

Senator Joseph Baldaccci, Michele Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Angela Okafor, I live in Bangor, and I am the Acting Director of Outreach and Community Engagement for the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous and Tribal Populations of Maine, an independent entity with a mission to examine racial disparities across all systems and to improve the status and outcomes for historically disadvantaged racial, Indigenous, and tribal populations in the state. Today, I am representing the Permanent Commission and sharing my own personal story to show how Mainecare can be a lifeline for a survivor of economic/domestic abuse.

I am honored to offer testimony in support of LD 199, “An Act to Improve the Health of Maine Residents by Removing Exclusions to the MaineCare program.” We extend deep gratitude to Speaker Rachel Talbot Ross for introducing this bill.

I came to Bangor, Maine in 2007 because my now estranged husband was hired by Rite Aid. In 2019, we became American citizens – the same year I made history and won a seat on the Bangor City Council. Early 2020 brought the chaos of the COVID-19 pandemic. Then on September 5th 2020, my now-estranged husband asked me for a quiet divorce or he would “deal with me and ruin my public reputation.”

September 10, I fainted at my house and had two blood transfusions. I had developed an acute bleeding ulcer and suffered extreme internal bleeding. That was the beginning of more than one year of fighting for my life. My estranged spouse’s only visit was two days after I was transported to the hospital unconscious, right in front of our three young children. He came to video record me on my hospital bed. I requested he be sent out and he threatened to take away my health insurance. In and out of the hospital became my everyday reality. More than a month later, I passed out again at the courthouse and was transported to the hospital again with a different type of internal bleeding.

I was advised to take an iron tablet and keep hydrated. The tests and endoscopies I was told I needed to find the cause of this internal bleeding were not going to happen. I was blessed to have a community of women that rallied around me to quickly raise money to ensure I am alive today and my three children still have a mother.

Access to health care has been weaponized against me in my divorce. Following a court ordered PFA, my estranged husband had his family file for a divorce in Nigeria, our country of origin. I counter filed here in Bangor in November 2020. I applied to the court to order him to reinstate my health insurance but the courts' hands were tied until jurisdiction was decided in April, 2021. I could have been dead by April 2021 if I had not gotten community support.

Imagine how many Maine residents, especially immigrants, have no family to support them through sickness. Imagine if this happened before I became an American citizen, even though I was working and paying taxes. Imagine that I did not have access to the MaineCare coverage that allowed me to continue my treatment. Imagine my fears to have bled internally for one month without answers. Now imagine what our communities would look like if we work together, Black, white, and brown, and make this a place where all of our families can get the care we need to stay healthy.

Thank you for your time, attention, and consideration of this bill. I respectfully urge you to support LD 199. I am happy to answer any questions.