

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and the members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. I'm here today to speak in support of LD 199. My name is Mohamed Ibrahim. I am a former asylum seeker and now a permanent resident. I live in Lewiston since 2012 and I work with **Maine People's Alliance as community organizer.**

Closing the discriminatory health care gap.

This pandemic has underscored that all Mainers need access to affordable, accessible health care, regardless of our income or immigration status. It is clearer than ever that our collective safety and our economic recovery are tied to each person's ability to get to the doctor or fill a prescription. In this budget we have the opportunity to close a discriminatory loophole and restore health care access for all Mainers, regardless of where they come from.

Closing the health care gap has positive societal impacts. Medicaid access reduces hunger, poverty, and evictions, and improves credit scores. Children are also much more likely to be enrolled if their parents have coverage and parents' health impacts wellbeing and financial stability of the whole family. The 130th legislature voted to close that gap for pregnant people and people under 21. Now you have the opportunity to fully right history.

In 2017, Mainers overwhelmingly voted to expand MaineCare, and today it is providing health care for more than 76,000 people at a critical time for public health. In 1996 Congress excluded many low-income immigrants from health care coverage under Medicaid and CHIP.

That includes Lawful Permanent Residents who have had their green card for less than five years, people who are undocumented, asylum seekers who are not pregnant or under 21, and people with uncertain statuses due to data errors or other immigration system challenges. Thankfully, that same year, with strong bipartisan support, this legislature stood up for health care for all and closed that discriminatory gap.

Tragically, Governor LePage reopened it in 2011, which exacerbated the already stark health care disparities that New Mainers face. That means that instead of getting preventative care, low-income new Mainers are forced to go to the emergency room, overwhelming our hospital system and worsening their health. It means that chronic manageable conditions like asthma, diabetes, and heart disease go untreated. There's a reason why uninsured adults are 25% more likely to die prematurely.

It is no surprise that our state experienced some of the worst racial and ethnic disparities for COVID-19 in the nation. Thankfully, last session the legislature partially closed that gap, restoring coverage for pregnant women and people under 21.

Now you have the opportunity to fully right history. You can end a harmful, discriminatory policy and restore coverage for all low-income Mainers regardless of their immigration status. It's the least we can do for our new Mainer sisters and brothers, who have disproportionately put their own health at risk as frontline and essential workers during the hardest time through the pandemic.

Thank you for your giving me the opportunity and thank you for your service.