

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: my name is Robbie Harrison. I live in Freeport and I am here today to testify in favor of LD 199.

As a community health outreach worker with the City of Portland, I directly support Spanish-speaking residents, most of whom are seeking asylum from their countries of origin, where they would have continued facing persecution, often at a governmental level, for aspects of their identities that we in the United States would affirm under a basic freedom of speech or expression.

I help these individuals and families navigate the social services that are necessary to be seen by a doctor, find a safe and stable place to live, and provide food for themselves and their families. As you can imagine, by dealing with these vulnerable aspects of people's identities, I get to know them well. I have asked questions about their home cultures. I have learned their nicknames. I know their kids' favorite colors.

I rarely hear about the physical and emotional journeys they had to take to get here. I And I don't ask.

My dream job is to be the bearer of good news to these new Mainers, to tell them after an unimaginably difficult experience of immigration, "Don't worry - you're here now and we'll take care of you."

Instead, I have to tell them, "We'll apply and see what happens," knowing that the Mainecare application process is difficult, with confounding outcomes and rationales that I struggle to explain. For example, why one young mother's child is granted insurance while the other is not. Or to witness, between two families of almost identical backgrounds who are both applying for asylum, that one family may be granted MaineCare coverage while the other is not. When I translate a rejection letter, my clients will look to me, a professional individual that they trust, to explain why this piece of paper would arrive to them and not their friends in a similar situation

I support LD 199 because I want to tell the clients I support with confidence that they will have access to health care in their new state. This will facilitate the process by which they find doctors and start taking care of themselves and their families. This will help them take the steps that they need to take their health into their own hands. Having access to healthcare is a top concern that all new Mainers should be able to cross off their list.

I went to college in Maine and received a degree in Spanish. I love my job working for the City of Portland and giving back to our community by finding ways for native Spanish speakers to access medical care in our beautiful state. By supporting and calling for LD199, I believe that Maine can continue to embrace racial equity and fair opportunities for all.

Thank you to the committee for hearing my testimony.