

# MaineHealth

MaineHealth  
Local Health Systems  
Franklin Community  
Health Network  
LincolnHealth  
MaineHealth Care At Home  
Maine Behavioral Healthcare  
Memorial Hospital  
Maine Medical Center  
Mid Coast-Parkview Health  
NorDx  
Pen Bay Medical Center  
Southern Maine Health Care  
Waldo County General Hospital  
Western Maine Health

Part of the  
MaineHealth Family  
MaineHealth Accountable  
Care Organization

MaineHealth Affiliates  
MaineGeneral Health  
New England Rehabilitation  
Hospital of Portland  
St. Mary's Health System

## **Testimony of Silas Zechman, MaineHealth In Support of LD 199, “An Act to Improve the Health of Maine Residents by Removing Exclusions to the MaineCare Program” Tuesday, March 28, 2023**

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, I am Silas Zechman, Program Supervisor for CarePartners Plus, a program of MaineHealth, and 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.”

MaineHealth is an integrated non-profit health care system that provides the full continuum of health care services to the residents of eleven counties in Maine and one in New Hampshire. As part of our mission of “Working Together So Maine’s Communities are the Healthiest in America,” MaineHealth’s members are committed to providing access to health care services for all patients regardless of their ability to pay or immigration status. We also provide free care to those at or below 200% of the federal poverty level, above and beyond the state requirement of 150%.

Although charity care provides a safety net, providing access to care is not enough to overcome all of the barriers faced by our uninsured patients. With that said, through MaineHealth’s nationally-recognized Access to Care programs, hundreds of thousands of Maine people have received high-quality care, improved their health status, received free and reduced-price medications, reduced unnecessary emergency department visits, and learned how to successfully navigate the complexities of the health care system.

While MaineHealth health systems and clinics do not inquire a patient’s immigration status, our providers come to know their patients and their personal stories. In caring for New Mainers, we are frequently confronted with situations in which a patient’s health is significantly impacted by being uninsured.

In preparation for this hearing, our care team members shared:

- Dr. Ben Felix at Maine Medical Partners shared the story of a man in his 50s who immigrated to the United States from Angola in an attempt to flee violence in his home country. He arrived in Maine

by walking from Brazil to California, and along the way, he experienced unimaginable hardships including the unexpected death of his wife. The patient had multiple medical conditions that had been untreated during his trip including hypertension and diabetes. Given his lack of health insurance and access to primary care, he was treated in the Emergency Department several times for these chronic conditions before establishing care in our primary care office. During our initial visit, we found that his diabetes was uncontrolled but he was unable to afford treatment given that he was uninsured. He also was unable to receive important disease preventing vaccines. He was also subsequently diagnosed with active tuberculosis, which was most certainly delayed by his lack of health insurance and access to health care. This delay in care could have led to the spread of this deadly infectious disease.

- My colleague at Access to Care shared the story of a woman who walked to the United States from Brazil and lost a child along the way. When she arrived here with her husband and other children, she did not apply for MaineCare as she was under the impression that would affect their application for asylum. She only went to the Emergency Department when the pain and bleeding from her miscarriage were too much for her to bear. Likewise, she did not bring her kids to see pediatricians, only bringing them to the emergency room whenever their temperatures rose to troubling degrees.

As these stories demonstrate, it is imperative that we extend health care coverage to all people living in Maine, regardless of immigration status. Many of our New Mainers have faced incredible challenges to reach our state to make a better life for themselves and their family. This vulnerable population deserves health care so that they can lead healthy, happy, and productive lives. Additionally, the health of our community also benefits by reducing unnecessary use of emergency resources, preventing the spread of infectious diseases, and would contribute to the overall health and productivity of our community.

On behalf of the families and communities we serve, we urge the Committee to support LD 199 to provide MaineCare coverage for ALL people who need it, regardless of immigration status.

Thank you for your time and I would be happy to answer any questions.