

TESTIMONY BY THE MAINE IMMIGRANTS' RIGHTS COALITION FOR L.D. 199:

"An Act to Improve the Health of Maine Residents by Removing Exclusions to the MaineCare Program"

Sponsor: Representative Rachel TALBOT ROSS of Portland

Health and Human Services Committee: Tuesday, March 28, 2023 at 2:00 PM

Dear Chair Baldacci, Chair Meyer, and Members of the Health & Human Services Committee:

My name is Tobin Williamson and I am speaking today on behalf of the Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition (MIRC), a coalition of almost 100 member organizations committed to advancing and defending the rights of immigrants. Our mission is to improve the legal, social, and economic conditions experienced by Maine's various immigrant communities, enhancing their lives while strengthening Maine through advocacy, information sharing, and collaboration. MIRC is based in Portland but we serve communities throughout the state. Speaking personally, I live in the City of Lewiston in Androscoggin County.

I am speaking before you today on behalf of the board, staff, and members of MIRC in strong support of L.D. 199. The legislation found in L.D. 199 has been one of our biggest priorities for multiple sessions, and the need is greater now than ever before. I would like to share one way this legislation would be lifechanging for so many people. Each week, MIRC is notified by hospital staff of people who give birth and are discharged from care with nowhere to go, having previously lived in shelter settings. We are grateful that newborns, children, and expectant mothers are now covered by MaineCare, following increased access last year; however, we believe it is also the right thing to do to make sure the new mothers also have continued access to health coverage, as well as other adults who are currently excluded from MaineCare.

Indeed, MIRC' core mission is to enhance the lives of Maine's immigrant communities. An essential part of doing that would be to make sure no one has to worry about coverage for basic healthcare needs, no matter where they come from or how they're classified once they're here. US Citizen, refugee, asylee, asylum seeker... everyone who lives here in Maine is first and foremost a human being who will ultimately need access to healthcare. As extensive research has shown over the years, preventative care is much cheaper (and healthier) in the long run than emergency care, which is what people with no healthcare coverage will seek when they have no other choice.

For these reasons, MIRC encourages you to pass L.D. 199 without delay and make Maine a "Welcome Home" for the people who choose to live here. Thank you for your consideration.

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