

Testimony in Support of LD 274: Resolve, Directing the Maine Data Organization To Determine the Best Methods and Definitions To Use in Collecting Data To Better Understand Racial and Ethnic Disparities in the Provision of Health Care in Maine

March 15, 2021

Senator Sanborn, Representative Tepler, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health Coverage, Insurance & Financial Services, my name is Ninette Irabaruta, Director of Public Policy and Advocacy at United Way of Greater Portland. I submit this written testimony on behalf of Thrive2027 to lend Thrive2027 support to LD 274.

Thrive2027 is our community's commitment to making Cumberland County stronger for everyone who calls it home. Powered by the community and led by United Way of Greater Portland, more than 300 business, non-profit, public, and community organizations have endorsed three 10-year goals that promise measurable and meaningful change in Greater Portland. These three goals are to (1) give kids a strong start, (2) empower neighbors to thrive – not just survive, and (3) help us all live longer, better.

Thrive2027 is not a new program – it is a new way of working. At the heart of this work is reviewing disaggregated data to understand where needs and gaps exist, determining what the implications of that data are, and identifying concrete solutions that can be implemented to address them.

There are several factors affecting health disparities in our state, including access to health care and the environments in which people live, work, learn, and play. There are also other factors such as race and ethnicity, disability, income, sexual orientation, transportation, and housing that specifically contribute to disparities in health care.

In Maine, the pandemic has shown how long-standing systemic health and social inequities have put many people from racial and ethnic minority groups at an increased risk of getting sick from COVID-19.¹ The lack of statistics on these disparities creates more health care barriers in communities of color – whether it is in Indigenous, African American, or new immigrant communities.

This bill would help us better understand health disparities that exist in our state. It would assist in identifying the problems and needs of specific groups of our population, which could lead to more targeted solutions that increase equity and resilience. The racially disaggregated data, for instance, would advance state authorities' understanding of health issues and outcomes for people of color.

The passage of this bill is important because it will help create systems that benefit all people who live in Maine. We believe that MHDO, in collaboration with other organizations, could

¹ <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/blog/how-dhhs-addressing-health-disparities-exposed-covid-19-2020-06-22>

create best practices and definitions to use in collecting data to better understand racial and ethnic disparities. MHDO's work could change decisions and policies that take into account people's unique health needs and ensure the health and well-being of all Mainers.

Thank you for your leadership and service.