



Testimony in Support of LD 372: An Act To Provide Maine Children Access to Affordable Health Care

March 5, 2021

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human 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 UWGP in support of providing Maine children access to affordable health care as stated in LD 372.

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.

Maine children's access to health care is extremely important not only to children themselves but to their families and communities at large. Access to health care influences children's physical and emotional health, connects them to necessary and appropriate services, and provides them with a strong foundation to reach their full potential as adults. Every child should be able to receive quality necessary health care because without it, their health and well-being, and in turn their families and communities, could be at risk for many years to come.

Access to health care impacts many if not all aspects of children's lives, from school attendance to academic achievement and whether students complete their education. A child's health also impacts their parent's ability to work. By providing health care access to all Maine children, we are helping to ensure their health, and future success, so that they can thrive and later contribute to our state's economy. Healthy children grow up to be productive adults who contribute and give back to their communities. We need to keep this in mind, as our state's older adult population is likely to grow at a much faster rate¹.

LD 372 seeks to make changes to the federal Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), known in Maine as the Cub Care program, which provides health coverage for children from birth to age 19. If passed, it would also provide health care to low-income children by increasing eligibility and expanding coverage. This is important because data show that in 2018, 7.9% of low-income children in Maine and 9.3% of low-income children in Cumberland County were not

¹ <https://www.maine.gov/dafs/economist/sites/maine.gov.dafs.economist/files/inline-files/Maine%20Population%20Outlook%20to%202026.pdf>

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insured². Access to affordable health care is a critically important strategy for Thrive2027 work and is foundational to all three goals.

With these critical health outcomes in mind, we respectfully encourage your support of LD 372.

Thank you for your leadership and service.

² SAHIE (Small Area Health Insurance Estimates) - https://www.census.gov/data-tools/demo/sahie/#/?s_statefips=23&s_stcou=23001,23003,23005,23007,23009,23011,23013,23015,23017,23019,23021,23023,23025,23027,23029,23031&s_agecat=4&s_iprcat=1