

Testimony in Support of LD 265, “An Act to Provide Women Access to Affordable Postpartum Care.”

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Senator Claxton, Representative Myer, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is James Myall, and I am a policy analyst at the Maine Center for Economic Policy. I’m writing to you today in support of LD 265, “An Act to Provide Women Access to Affordable Postpartum Care.” MECEP supports LD 265 because access to affordable health care can make a huge difference in the prospects of new mothers and their children.

The income eligibility rules for MaineCare allow new mothers to gain coverage from the program if their income is under 214 percent of the federal poverty level, compared to 138 percent for other parents. This expanded eligibility recognizes new mothers’ unique health care needs and helps ensure that moms have access to the care they need during a critical time in their lives and the lives of their child.

LD 265 would increase the length of time during which new mothers are eligible under the higher income threshold, from 60 days to 12 months.

It is important that new mothers have access to affordable care well beyond the current 60-day period. Recent medical research has shown that postpartum care should not be limited to a single follow-up visit with a midwife or gynecologist. Mental health, in particular, is a growing area of concern, and treatment of conditions such as post-partum depression may take much longer than 60 days. Other chronic conditions such as hypertension or diabetes in new mothers may also require longer-term monitoring and treatments.¹ It is imperative that new mothers in Maine have access to care during this potentially vulnerable period.

In recent years there has been increasing attention on the problem of maternal mortality in the United States, which has one of the worst rates of any major developed nation.² Because of systemic disparities in access to health care, deaths among recent Black and Latina mothers are even more common than for white mothers. At least one-third of pregnancy-related deaths in the United States occur in the postpartum period,³ and many are preventable with early diagnosis proper treatment.⁴ Expanding access to affordable care is integral to reducing maternal mortality for all Americans, but especially among women of color.

Ensuring coverage for new mothers is also good for young children. Research has shown that whether a child has access to health care is closely related to their parents’ insurance status.⁵ If new mothers have access to affordable care and are seeing their health care provider for regular check-ups, there’s an increased chance that their children will also get good care in the critical first year of life.

New mothers and their children are some of the most vulnerable populations in our state and those who are most in need of affordable health care. Protecting these Mainers and ensuring that they have the best start to their lives as parents is both a moral duty and a smart investment in our state’s future.

Thank you. As always, I’ll be happy to answer any questions via email at jmyall@mecep.org.

Notes

¹ <https://www.kff.org/womens-health-policy/issue-brief/expanding-postpartum-medicaid-coverage/>

² <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/issue-briefs/2020/nov/maternal-mortality-maternity-care-us-compared-10-countries>

³ https://aspe.hhs.gov/system/files/aspe-files/264076/healthy-women-healthy-pregnancies-healthy-future-action-plan_0.pdf

⁴ https://www.cdc.gov/mmwr/volumes/68/wr/mm6818e1.htm?s_cid=mm6818e1_w

⁵ <https://www.cbpp.org/research/coverage-of-parents-helps-children-too>

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Please find attached testimony in support of LD 265 on behalf of the Maine Center for Economic Policy.