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Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Catherine Buxton, I live in Portland and I am writing today to testify **in favor of** LD 718.

It has been proven time and time again that access to affordable, accessible, and adequate health care coverage makes a huge impact in people's lives and livelihoods and prosperity. I worked as a Marketplace and MaineCare Navigator at Planned Parenthood through a grant funded by the Maine Health Access Foundation in 2016/17. For many of my clients, getting on MaineCare meant not having to choose between groceries or a life-saving prescription. For others, it meant finally accessing a therapist or mental health services for the first time in their lives. **Everyone deserves equal access to the health care safety net. Immigrants should be no exception.** There is no fair or just reason that specific immigrant families are excluded from accessing MaineCare benefits. Immigrants' tax dollars pay into the existing system, yet they are denied access and see no benefits.

I've seen firsthand that gaining access to health care coverage is difficult enough for immigrant families in Maine. LD71.8 would lessen one barrier to health for specific immigrant populations.

During my time as a Navigator, I worked with one family from Burundi who would be helped so much by this measure. Initially, they came to me to help sort through the piles and piles of paperwork--immigration papers, pay stubs, birth certificates and more--that they needed to submit in order to get their youngest children enrolled in CHIP. Both

parents worked full-time, sometimes upwards of 80 hours a week as home health aides. Their oldest son was a cashier at Hannaford and a senior in high school. While the younger children were born in Maine and had access to MaineCare, due to their immigration status neither parents nor the oldest child qualified for any health insurance coverage offered by the state or federal government. Instead, both parents worked long hours because a significant portion of the family's income went to buying health insurance for themselves and their eldest son on the private market. We spent hours and hours on the phone with DHHS chasing down eligibility determinations, and while I was eventually able to enroll their children in CHIP I could not help their parent lessen the financial burden of health care on the whole family. So much labor and so many paychecks, including their high school son's, was going towards paying for a health insurance plan that would otherwise be free had their circumstances been just slightly different.

When Medicaid Expansion passed in 2017, I was so excited about all my former clients who would be served. But I thought of this family often. I knew they were still left behind.

Let's close the gap and ensure that *all* immigrants have access to MaineCare and CHIP. I wished every day--and I know this family did tenfold--that they could have saved their paychecks for food, clothes for the children, or for the college their son was so excited to attend.

LD71.8 renders an oversight and makes a big difference for over 500 Mainers, like my clients, who have currently been left behind. Let's offer more Mainers health care coverage and the opportunity to greater health outcomes, equity, and financial stability.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Catherine Buxton