



Testimony in support of LD 718

[An Act To Improve the Health of Maine Residents by Closing Coverage Gaps in the MaineCare Program and the Children's Health Insurance Program](#)

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Nicole Clegg and I serve as the Senior Vice President of Public Affairs at Planned Parenthood of Northern New England and am pleased to submit testimony in support LD 718.

Planned Parenthood of Northern New England provides comprehensive reproductive and sexual health care to more than 14,000 people in Maine at four health centers located in Biddeford, Portland, Sanford and Topsham. People turn to us for affordable, high-quality care including wellness exams, birth control, disease testing and treatment, cancer screenings, abortion care as well as a variety of primary care services. We see everyone who comes to us regardless of ability to pay, and in a typical year, we provide more than \$4 million in free and discounted care to our communities in Maine.

As a mission driven health care provider, we fundamentally believe everyone should be able to get affordable, high quality sexual and reproductive health care in their communities, no matter where they live or how much money they make and we advocate for policies that help make this vision a reality.

LD 718 closes a significant gap in Maine's Health Care system, extending access to CHIP and MaineCare to otherwise ineligible populations of New Mainers who have been unfairly exempted from participation in state health care programs for nearly a decade. While Maine's immigrant population is smaller relative to that of the country as whole, their impact in our state significant, contributing more than 60 million dollars in state and federal taxes annually and helping fill key frontline roles in our economy from food production to health care.

The pandemic and the ensuing economic slowdown have only underscored the urgent need for action to close this gap. Job insecurity has put access to health insurance in jeopardy or out of reach for many Mainers. We saw this shift almost immediately at PPNNE as the number of patients without insurance rose starkly in the months after the pandemic hit. The impact of the virus has been disproportionately borne by those already disadvantaged. At one point last June, Maine had the largest racial disparity in the nation for COVID infections with Black Mainers accounting for roughly a quarter of all positive COVID cases, despite representing less than two percent of the total Maine population; similar though less stark disparities in positivity were observed among Latinx and Asian Mainers.

In 2017, Question 2 passed with the approval of nearly 60% of the electorate, extending access to Medicaid for more 70,000 Mainers-- the impact of this expansion cannot not be overstated,

improving health outcomes both directly for those newly eligible, and indirectly for all Mainers through improved population health and renewed support for health care providers (especially in rural areas). This experience has made it crystal clear that when people have access to adequate healthcare coverage, we all benefit and closing this coverage gap will further support healthy communities, workforce and a stronger economy.

By allowing immigrant populations ineligible for federal coverage programs to access CHIP and MaineCare, LD 718 would begin to alleviate an inequity that currently spans generations; offering coverage to children whose current lack of care leaves them unprotected at the beginning of their lives as well as providing access to preventative testing and treatment to older adults whose health may deteriorate faster because they aren't covered by MaineCare. For these reasons, I urge you to vote to pass LD 718.