

**Testimony for the 130th Session of the Maine Legislature
Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services**

Testimony in favor 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

Public Hearing, April 15, 2021

Chairpersons Senator Claxton and Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee On Health and Human Services, my name is Carter Friend and I live in Portland. I am submitting this testimony in support of LD 718 on behalf of the Anti-Racist Policy Committee of HopeGateWay Church in Portland.

Access to health care is a basic human right. And it is one that should not be denied because of lack of income, immigration status, race, ethnicity, language proficiency, or for any other reason. No one should have to choose between going to a doctor and buying food, or have to go without needed medication, because they cannot afford the cost of medical care. LD 718 will take an important step toward making sure this is no longer the case in Maine by providing access to MaineCare and CHIP coverage for Maine residents with low income who are immigrants.

The covid pandemic has shown a bright spotlight on how important this is. In June, Maine had the largest racial disparity *in the nation* for COVID infections. Black Mainers accounted for about a quarter of all positive COVID cases, even though they represent less than two percent of the total Maine population. There were disparities for Latinx and Asian Mainers as well. Many immigrants have literally been risking their lives by working frontline jobs during the pandemic, even though they often do not have access to MaineCare because of their immigration status. It is time to fix this inequity – and correct this injustice – by enacting LD 718 into law.

Enacting LD 718 would also be consistent with Maine's proud history of providing MaineCare coverage for immigrants. In 1996, Congress barred Medicaid access for all but a few categories of immigrants. But that same year, with strong bipartisan support, the Maine legislature exercised its right under federal law to use state funds to continue providing MaineCare to Maine residents with low income who are immigrants. In 2011, in a departure from Maine's longstanding commitment not to discriminate against immigrants, the LePage administration reversed the policy. LD 718 will restore our commitment to our immigrant friends, neighbors and co-workers.

We hope that you will address this inequity in access to health care and vote in favor of LD 718. Thank you.

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