

Malvina Gregory
Portland

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: my name is Malvina Gregory, I live in Portland and I writing today to testify in favor of LD 718.

When I first met my husband he was undocumented, and had been for the past 6 years. He worked as a line cook and a cleaner, and one day he developed a cough. It's hard to be sick when you don't get PTO and work seven days a week. He kept working. The cough kept him up at night. And then after over two sleepless weeks of coughing I could hear his lungs begin to wheeze and rattle at night. I am a medical Interpreter. I know that untreated pneumonia can be dangerous. We didn't know what to do.

I'm lucky. I have a friend who's a doctor. We called, and that friend came by for a home visit. They tentatively diagnosed my husband as having walking pneumonia. Definite diagnosis would have required an ER trip costing over a thousand dollars and a \$500 sputum test, they said. They wrote us a simple prescription for antibiotics. I am thankful for the privilege that gave me friends with prescription pads; thankful for a friend who saw the spirit of medical treatment not the letters defined by insurance companies; thankful that my husband got better. It could have been so much worse.

We have a friend who likewise is undocumented and has a congenital chronic health condition. He works three jobs in pain some days. Luckily he was connected with a Community Health Center that helps treat his aching bones. Nevertheless, when he needed surgery his only support was his church that did a fundraiser to help him pay the costs.

As a medical Interpreter I have seen many undocumented patients who have arrived for urgent care with aggravated symptoms because they were scared to get treatment. Scared of medical bills, scared of admitting they didn't have papers. I have seen how these patients later have to apply for freecare because they can't pay the bills that come, and the hospital is forced to assume the expense. We all pay one way or another, and the human cost along the way because people don't have preventative care is heartbreaking.

I urge you to help care for ALL the residents of our state. If the COVID-19 pandemic has shown us anything, it is that we only have healthy communities when all of us have good, reliable access to preventative care. Supporting LD 718 is morally and economically the wise thing to do.

Sincerely,
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(and Etelvino Pereira de Souza)
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