



Maine People's Alliance

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: my name is Mohamed Ali Ibrahim and I am an organizer for Maine People's Alliance. I live in Auburn, and I am here today to testify in favor of LD 718.

MPA is Maine's largest community action organization with over 32,000 members across the state. Our mission is to create a world where everyone has what they need, contributes what they can, and no one is left behind.

In addition to being an organizer with MPA, I am also a new Mainer. In 2012 I fled political persecution in my homeland of Djibouti and sought asylum here in Maine. What I did not know when I arrived was that the year before, in a major departure from Maine's longstanding commitment to not discriminate against immigrants, the LePage administration reversed the policy, cutting health care for hundreds of new Mainers, including asylum seekers like me.

LePage's reversal forced asylum seekers like me into an unenviable Catch-22. Under federal law, we are barred from working for 150 days after we apply for asylum. That makes it impossible to afford medical care. Then we are barred from using programs like MaineCare and CHIP, leaving us no way to get access to health care.

Thank God that I didn't get sick in the long months when I was caught in medical limbo, but not everyone is so lucky. I have heard countless stories from other new Mainers who have medical conditions but who are barred from accessing medical care. It's an incredibly cruel policy that undoubtedly has cost lives and has helped lead to record racial disparities in Maine's COVID infection rates.

One thing that this pandemic has taught us all is that we're only as healthy as the least healthy among us. When we deny anyone access to medical care based on their immigration status, we are making our whole society sicker. I urge you to reverse this injustice and vote for LD 718. Thank you.