

Senator Claxton  
Representative Meyer  
Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

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April 15, 2021

**Support for 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**

Immigrants arriving in the United States often encounter multiple stressors, including adjusting to a new culture and language, navigating through a new system, and any trauma experienced before arrival. Many of these immigrants experience multiple stressors, which may increase the risk of developing mental health issues such as depression. Immigrants' vulnerability to mental health issues is unique due to their pre-migration and post-migration experiences compared to the general population. Besides, the lack of familiar support and perception of mental illness among people from developing countries are additional stressors. I strongly support 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, which would give immigrants the right to access healthcare.

As a Master of Social Work intern, I assisted a family of four during the last 12 weeks. The father arrived in 2017 in Maine and has a work permit. Because of COVID-19, his work hours went down to 10-20 hours a week. He has three girls, which at the age of 13, 14, and 19. All three arrived on July 16, 2020, in Texas. The two younger girls were held at BCFS, a nonprofit organization, while in custody at Texas Health and Human Services (Texas HHS) until November 2020. Their older sister had arrived with them in Texas in July 2020 and was held in an immigration detention center until February 2020. The family lives in a one-bedroom apartment; all three girls slept on a full-size mattress while the father slept on the living room floor.

The family meets the income eligibility guidelines for Mainecare; however, the children just arrived in Maine and have not submitted their asylum application to the immigration court; therefore, they are undocumented immigrants and also ineligible for Mainecare. The father's immigration status is Permanent Resident Under Color of Law (PROCUL). This PROCUL category was created by the immigration court and is a public benefit category. For a person to be residing "under color of law," USCIS is aware of a person living in America. This person must provide a written assurance that enforcement of deportation is not intended. A PRUCOL status cannot directly apply for U.S. citizenship or sponsor family members to acquire U.S. citizenship. Additionally, a person residing in America without present legal immigration status not limited to citizenship, permanent residency, or unexpired immigrant visa is an undocumented immigrant and ineligible for Mainecare. The children just arrived in Maine and have not submitted their

asylum application to the immigration court; therefore, they are undocumented immigrants and also ineligible for MaineCare.

By improving the healthcare access for Maine's residents by closing the MaineCare program's gap and the access to children's health insurance regardless of their immigration status, we are creating a health-promoting atmosphere and a foundation for a healthier Maine. I urge the committee to pass LD 718. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Kindest Regards,  
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