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My name is Mali Obomsawin and I am a member of the Wabanaki community, from western Maine.

It has never been more clear how critical healthcare access is to the wellbeing of the public. During this pandemic, many wealthy and privileged people have been forced to see that their own wellbeing is dependent on that of the underprivileged – a fact that may have been easier to ignore before COVID 19. COVID19 has been a reminder of how unjust and dysfunctional the public health system can be and how unprepared the system itself was for a catastrophe of this magnitude.

Our immigrant communities are a barometer for racism in public health. Many in the immigrant community fear or avoid going to the doctor when they are sick because it could put their family at risk for deportation, let alone for lack of insurance coverage. This is an injustice.

Studies show that preventative care – i.e. early access to healthcare before illnesses and conditions turn into an emergency – is cost effective for healthcare system in the long run. It makes the system more sustainable. With a healthy society, the nation will be able to reopen sooner with healthy workforce. Expanding Mainecare to everyone, especially essential workers, is good for the future.

I think we can learn a lot about public health needs from our failures and successes during this pandemic. I got vaccinated two weeks ago: it was free for everyone, with people in highest need having access first, there were no questions asked, no complicated run-arounds with insurance companies, no copays, no “nationality” or immigration status questions. This will continue until everyone is vaccinated, until everyone is safe. This is what an equitable functioning healthcare system looks like.

I want to close by saying that this is absolutely a matter of racial justice. After the shootings in Atlanta and Minneapolis in the last two weeks, a lot of people are proclaiming that they stand with Asian and Black communities. With kids still in cages in the southwest, there are a lot of people proclaiming that they stand in solidarity with immigrant families. In response to the murder of Daunte Wright by a law enforcement, there are a lot of people in power right now - people who make laws - who want us to believe that you think Black lives matter. Many of Maine’s immigrants are from the Black -African community. You can prove your commitment to these communities by expanding Mainecare to them.