

April 15th, 2021

Good morning Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Izzy Ostrowski, and I'm the Social Change Advocate at Preble Street, a human services anti-poverty agency with over a dozen programs and services provided across the state. I am here today to testify in support 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.

At Preble Street, our programs work to meet the needs of people experiencing homelessness, food insecurity, and poverty. For the individuals and families we serve that are immigrants, it means also navigating the complexities of immigration status and a lack of access to resources. The trauma that the immigration system inflicts often affects mental health, physical health, and overall wellbeing.

The Maine Medical Center-Preble Street Learning Collaborative (MMC-PSLC) is one program that has long provided care to people without MaineCare who we cannot successfully connect to other resources because of issues with insurance. This includes immigrants with mental health issues, dental care, as well as ongoing primary care needs. While this service is essential and invaluable, it cannot possibly meet the need of New Mainers who cannot access critical healthcare services.

In addition to physical and mental health, a lack of adequate access to healthcare also affects every facet of life. For example, Nicole, a New Mainer who has been living in Maine for two years, went almost two years with vision issues because she did not have access to health insurance and an eye doctor. Nicole experienced severe migraines but, without proper health coverage, she did not know whether her high blood pressure, sight issues, or neither, were causing the migraines. Nicole's eight-year-old twin daughters also have trouble seeing which has affected their learning and performance in school. Her daughters were diagnosed with sight issues last year through a clinic, but they are still waiting another five months to get an appointment with a doctor.

This is the reality for so many immigrants in Maine; waiting and waiting for dire resources that may never come because of a lack of healthcare coverage. There are immigrants in Maine carrying the weight of homelessness, hunger, poverty, health issues and immigration status while simultaneously navigating language barriers and the stress of immigrating. This bill is a critical step in increasing access to healthcare and resources for New Mainers and working to end the disparities that currently exist. For this reason, Preble Street urgently asks you to vote in support of LD 718. Thank you for your time.