



Testimony 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

April 14, 2021

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Anita Ruff. I am a resident of Brunswick, and I am the Executive Director of the Oasis Free Clinics. I am submitting testimony in favor of LD 718.

For the past 25 years, the Oasis Free Clinics has provided free medical, dental and prescription assistance services to uninsured adults with low incomes who live in Brunswick, Harpswell, Freeport, Durham, and Sagadahoc County. We are part of the Midcoast's safety net, serving those who fall through the cracks of Maine's healthcare system, including immigrants and those who have come to the United States seeking asylum.

We work closely with faith-based organizations and community groups to assure that adults seeking asylum or who have recently immigrated to Maine have access to medical and dental care. In the past five years, we have gone from one or two to 35 patients whose primary language is not English. The variety of languages and dialects spoken includes Taiwanese, Thai, French, Vietnamese, Lingala, and Portuguese, and thanks to a telephonic language line, we are able to provide linguistically appropriate medical interpretation services. There is a vibrancy that our newest members of the community bring to the clinic, and we at Oasis are honored to have the opportunity to become their medical home.

We also recognize that access to healthcare and access to health insurance are not the same thing. Despite our best efforts, there are limitations on what we are able to offer our patients. When MaineCare expansion became law, we were thrilled for our patients, hiring a navigator who would work with our patients to enroll. We knew that MaineCare expansion brought greater access to mental health services, eye exams, and specialty care – services we struggle to provide. Unfortunately, because of LePage administration policy changes, access became more elusive, and for immigrants and those seeking asylum, it was nonexistent.

In 2011, the LePage administration changed Maine law, essentially blocking many immigrants from accessing government aid for food assistance, help with basic needs for children, and healthcare. Passing LD 718 is your opportunity to reverse this terrible policy and to end Maine's government sanctioned discrimination against its newest residents while increasing access to medical and mental health services for children and adults. I urge you to vote yes in support of LD 718. Thank you for your consideration.