

Martha Stein  
Hope Acts

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.

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: my name is Martha Stein, I am the Executive Director of Hope Acts, a nonprofit organization that works to support new asylum seekers. We serve the greater Portland area. I am submitting testimony in favor of LD 718.

Everyone living in Maine deserves access to health care. Allowing all low-income immigrants to apply for MaineCare is the right thing to do. Our health care system -- a patchwork of no care, free care, MaineCare, emergency MaineCare, etc. is dizzying for most of us to understand. If you are new to the U.S. and especially if you are just starting to learn English, it is impossible to understand. And, if you or a family member become ill, you need medical care, regardless of immigration status.

I can't tell you how many times an asylum seeker client comes to our office clutching a piece of mail that they don't fully understand. It is usually a bill for tests, lab fees or something else that they have no ability to pay. Even worse, people will forgo care because they worry about receiving a bill that they cannot pay. I would also like to bring to your attention the need for mental health services. So many of the people we work with would benefit from therapy to address stress, anxiety, depression and more. Without MaineCare, their options are incredibly limited.

. Asylum seekers, the people I work with, are not permitted to work in the United States until they receive a work permit, a process that can take 1-2 years. They are anxious to support themselves and move to independence. Immigrants are critical to Maine's economy; as soon as they are legally allowed to work, local businesses are anxious to hire these New Mainers. They are hard workers who are willing to work multiple jobs, 2nd and 3rd shift positions and in jobs, many of which would otherwise go unfilled. Let's treat immigrants the same way we treat everyone else. No one should be denied medical care because of where they were born. Nor should they be strapped with debt that they unknowingly fell into because of a medical procedure deemed appropriate by a doctor.

Please support LD718. Everyone deserves access to health care.

Thank you,

Martha Stein  
Executive Director  
Hope Acts, Portland  
martha@hopeacts.org