

Testimony 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

Andrea Steward

[Andrea.steward@maine.edu](mailto:Andrea.steward@maine.edu)

Good Morning Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Andrea Steward and I am a resident of Stillwater. I currently serve on the board of Welcoming Immigrant Neighbors (WIN) – Bangor. I am submitting testimony in favor 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.

Welcoming Immigrant Neighbors – Bangor, strives to help our new neighbors meet basic needs, access essential services, find social supports, and experience a warm welcome to our shared community. My hope as a volunteer with WIN, is to befriend New Mainers and help them integrate into the community. Though much of my time has been spent helping people fill out MaineCare forms, sliding scale fee applications, and other medical forms which are often only provided in English. Last year, I helped the same individual apply to MaineCare multiple times, so they could be denied, because in order to receive the current piecemeal medical services offered you must first be denied MaineCare. Due to the lack of access to proper health care coverage, there's a much lower utilization of the health care system. Without coverage or the means to pay for care, people will delay seeking medical care until the situation has become emergent. Consequently, this leads to an increase in advanced disease because people have no other option but to wait, accruing costly medical bills, instead of receiving preventative care, and the burden of these costs is felt by all of us. Studies show that immigrants remain below or on par with other residents for utilization of services when provided with health coverage. Approximately 50% of the children WIN serves have not received any medical treatment since moving to Maine. They have rarely received a hearing or vision screening, which only exacerbates the difficulties they are already facing in school. One 12-year-old boy was referred

to an eye doctor by his Primary Care, but we had to cancel the appointment because there's no sliding scale fee or coverage for eye care, and his family could not afford the out-of-pocket costs of a \$150 minimum eye exam let alone an eyeglasses prescription.

Penobscot Community Health Center is currently the only health center offering dental services on a sliding scale fee. Penobscot Community Health Center has limited capacity and their new patient intake usually opens once every few months for 24 – 48 hours during which time you must call in and put your name on a list. Getting your name on the list does not guarantee an appointment, but rather with the possibility to receive an appointment. We had a 6-year-old boy with 21 cavities. These were not small cavities, when he opened his mouth, his teeth were completely black. There was no coverage for his dental needs.

Immunizations are now required by the state of Maine for all children in public schools. Fortunately, there are Public Health Clinics offering immunizations to kids at no charge, except the \$15 administration fee. The mandate requires 5 immunizations with 4 of these immunizations requiring boosters. At \$15 per immunization for administration fee, it would cost \$75 for the initial vaccination costs of one child. For adults, it's a much bleaker outlook as the fees are not waived, and a single dose of MMR immunization costs \$100 plus the \$15 administration fee. As I'm sure we're all aware, not having access to immunizations is a public health issue.

In 2016, immigrants contributed 62 million dollars in state taxes. Immigrants play a substantial role in industries such as food production, health care, and manufacturing. These industries are the backbone of Maine, and yet the majority of immigrants in these roles have no access to health coverage. Additionally, because of these roles, many immigrants have found themselves at an increased risk of exposure to COVID-19 while lacking access to testing and health care. They are also more likely to live in multigenerational homes which increases the risk

of exposure to their entire household. The current system is inefficient, ineffectual, and costly to everyone. The collective well-being of our communities is tied to every individual being able to access adequate health care.

Thank you, Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and members of the committee, for your consideration of LD 718. I strongly encourage you to pass LD 718 and close this gap in our health care system. I am happy to answer any questions.

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