



April 15, 2021

Senator Ned Claxton
Representative Michele Meyer
Committee on Health and Human Services
Cross Building, Room 209
Augusta, ME 04333

Submitted via Legislature's Testimony Submissions portal

Re: 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

Dear Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and Honorable Members of the Committee:

I am a lawyer who has specialized in immigration law and policy for 35 years. I am also the director of the Maine Business Immigration Coalition (MeBIC). MeBIC is Maine's only resource dedicated to providing information, education and advocacy on immigration and related issues from and for the business and economic perspective. MeBIC strongly supports LD 718.

As you know, Maine is the nation's oldest state. With our low birth rates, last year Maine had the dubious distinction of hitting the tipping point of more people being over age 65 than under age 18, a full 15 years ahead of the rest of New England¹. Immigrants have been key to stemming our population decline over the past decade. Maine's immigrants are overall highly educated, of working age, and are essential for Maine to have vibrant communities, a robust workforce, and a strong economy.

Unfortunately, in 1996, when Congress decided to remake the federal welfare system, it did so largely on the backs of immigrants. Sixty-seven percent of the financial savings of federal welfare reform was accomplished by taking benefits away from legal immigrants.

Since then, permanent residents who have had their "green cards" for less than five years are ineligible for most federal public benefits, as are asylum seekers, those with Temporary Protected Status who have been living here legally in most cases for two decades or more, those with DACA who came to the U.S. as children, spouses and children of U.S. citizens who are in the process applying for residency, and myriad other categories of immigrants.

¹ <https://www.bostonfed.org/publications/new-england-public-policy-center-regional-briefs/2019/aging-and-declining-populations-in-northern-new-england.aspx>; accessed April 14, 2021.

Despite working legally and paying taxes, federal law prohibits these and other immigrants from accessing most public benefits.

Maine fortunately decided to cover some of these people, including those with young children or disabilities and others with specific vulnerabilities. But most of Maine's immigrants ineligible under federal public benefits eligibility law remain left out.

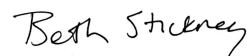
The shortsightedness of the welfare reform approach has been in stark relief this past pandemic year. The disparate impact of COVID on immigrants in Maine and nationwide can no doubt be directly linked to many being afraid to access health care, including COVID testing, because of fears of the cost of care (and lack of awareness that it should be free).

Immigrants often work in full-time jobs that don't provide health insurance, and don't pay enough to lift them out of poverty. Expanding MaineCare and CHIP eligibility to all income eligible immigrants will help Maine's immigrants get health care sooner, to prevent or catch illness before it becomes more serious, more devastating to them and their families, and more costly to treat. Expanded MaineCare and CHIP will lead to healthier families and communities in general, and to a healthier workforce.

Recently, nearly 100 Maine businesses, chambers of commerce, trade associations, and higher education institutions have signed the [Maine Compact on Immigration](#) (attached) urging state leaders to "adopt policies and practices to help Maine become a destination of choice for immigrants to the U.S. and that provide an environment where immigrants can reach their full potential in our state."

LD 718's expansion of MaineCare and CHIP eligibility shows that Maine values all immigrants, and takes care of all those who choose to work, pay taxes, and contribute to Maine as their home. I urge you to pass LD 718.

Sincerely,



Beth Stickney, Esq.
Executive Director



MAINE COMPACT *on* IMMIGRATION

The **Maine Compact on Immigration** is a bipartisan initiative by members of Maine's business community and higher education institutions to promote immigration policies that will strengthen our economy and communities, attract and retain global talent, and bring new entrepreneurs, businesses and workers to our nation and state. The Compact's principles reflect the signatories' vision of commonsense and future-focused federal immigration reforms that reaffirm the country's commitment to remaining a nation that welcomes immigrants, and that address the realities of our state's and nation's workforce needs and demographic challenges. These principles also affirm the signatories' support for state and local policies and practices that recognize the myriad economic contributions immigrants make as volunteers, consumers, students, workers, entrepreneurs, taxpayers, and civically engaged citizens, strengthening Maine's communities and economy.

We urge Maine's congressional delegation and state leaders to adopt the principles of the Maine Compact on Immigration to guide the immigration discussion in our state. Furthermore, we encourage state and local leaders to follow suit with policies, practices and programs that create welcoming communities in Maine.

Maine Compact on Immigration Principles:

- 1. FEDERAL SOLUTIONS:** Immigration policy is a federal issue with profound impact on states and the economy. We urge Maine's congressional delegation to lead aggressive efforts to enact immigration reforms that update and vastly improve our nation's outdated immigration system, protect our borders while preserving due process and human rights, and facilitate trade. Maine will thrive with a federal immigration system that is flexible enough to address the needs of businesses, while protecting the interests of both foreign-born and native-born workers.
- 2. STRENGTHENING OUR ECONOMY & WORKFORCE:** For our state economy to grow and compete, Maine needs a robust workforce and policies that prioritize attracting and retaining global talent. This necessitates a federal immigration system that is both responsive to, and effective at, meeting the demands of Maine's economy and the sectors that drive growth in our state. We also call on state leaders to adopt policies and practices to help Maine become a destination of choice for immigrants to the U.S. and that provide an environment where immigrants can reach their full potential in our state.
- 3. FAMILY:** Strong families are critical to developing successful individuals and cohesive communities. Federal immigration policies should prioritize keeping families together in order to ensure the most supportive home environments for all children in our country and across our state.
- 4. A COMMONSENSE APPROACH:** Immigrants have always been, and remain, an important part of our communities. We must adopt a commonsense approach to immigration that reflects our long-established values and recognizes the critical role that immigration has played in the history, culture, and economy of both our state and the nation. Federal immigration policies must provide

sensible and fair paths forward for immigrants wishing to come to the U.S. to find opportunity and to work, to join their immediate families, and to seek refuge from persecution. Our immigration laws must also include a path towards citizenship for those already here who lack legal status and who are of good character, pay taxes, and are committed to becoming fully participating members of our society and culture.

- 5. EFFECTIVE ENFORCEMENT:** We support a federal immigration enforcement strategy that emphasizes public safety, targets serious crime, safeguards witnesses and victims, keeps families together whenever possible, and considers the interests of and unintended consequences to businesses, the workforce, and communities. Local law enforcement resources should focus on criminal activities, not on civil violations of federal code.

- 6. STRONG COMMUNITIES:** Communities that grow and attract talent are the ones that are welcoming to all. We support state and local policies, practices and programs that provide a welcoming environment for immigrants and offer all residents the tools and opportunities they need to succeed.

Signatories

Adele Masengo Designs	Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences	Eastern Maine Development Corporation
American Roots	Bowdoin College	Educate Maine
Androscoggin Bank	C. Love Cookie Project/ C. Love Baking School	Fisherman's Net
Associated General Contractors of Maine	Cabot7	Focus Maine
Austin Street Brewery	Cambium	Fogtown Brewing Co.
Axiom	Catama Productions	Geiger
Bangor Region Chamber of Commerce	Central Maine Power	Goodwill Industries of Northern New England
Bangor Savings Bank	Coastal Enterprises, Inc. (CEI)	Gorham Savings Bank
Bar Harbor Chamber of Commerce	Coffee by Design	Greater Portland Immigrant Welcome Center
Bates College	Colby College	GWI (Great Works Internet)
Bernstein Shur	Common Census	Hancock Lumber
BerryDunn	Community Concepts Finance Corporation	Hospitality Maine
Biddeford-Saco Chamber of Commerce & Industry	Dead River	Hussey Seating

IntWork, LLC	MaineHealth	Sappi North America
Jasper Wyman & Sons	Mandy Levine Consulting, LLC	Sebasco Harbor Resort
Lee Auto Malls	Manufacturers Association of Maine	Southern Midcoast Chamber of Commerce
Lee International	MEMIC	Spurwink
Lewiston-Auburn Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce	Northern Light Health	St. Joseph's College
Live and Work in Maine	ON Semiconductor	St.Germain
Lucro Management	Orono Brewing	The Jackson Laboratory
Luke's Lobster	Pan Tim Wood Products	Thomas College
Maine Beer Company	Penobscot Community Health Care	Tilson
Maine Business Immigration Coalition (MeBIC)	Portland Regional Chamber of Commerce	TRSS Wealth Management
Maine Center for Entrepreneurs	Portland Yacht Services	Tyson / Barber Foods
Maine College of Art	Preti Flaherty	Union River Lobster Pot
Maine Community Action Partnership	ProSearch	University of New England
Maine Dairy Farmers Association	Rainbow Construction, Inc.	Unum Group
Maine Grocers & Food Producers Association	Ready Seafood	Valico Group
Maine Health Care Association	Retail Association of Maine	Verrill Dana
Maine State Chamber of Commerce	Revision Energy	VETRO FiberMap
Maine Stream Finance	Rising Tide Brewing Co.	WEX
Maine Tourism Association	Rosemont Market & Bakery	Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine
	RSC Consulting	