

Good morning Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Abdulkerim Said and I am the Executive Director of New Mainers Public Health Initiative. I'm testifying in support of LD 718 today.

As a result of the ACA almost 23 million Americans gained health care access. In our state through Maine Care expansion, more than 70, 000 people gained access to coverage, however many low-income immigrants were not covered under Maine Care expansion due to federal regulations. LD 718 will close gaps for access to care for many low-income immigrants and marginalized communities.

At New Mainers Public Health Initiative, we see firsthand how harmful these gaps in coverage are for immigrants in our community. We work closely with DHHS and organizations like Consumers for Affordable Health Care to assist people with enrolling in health care coverage like Maine Care or the Marketplace. Too many times we have to tell people that they are not eligible for any coverage because of their immigration status. This causes people to avoid preventive care or conditions that need attention until they become an emergency. This is not a smart way to care for the residents of our state.

The poor infrastructure of public health and the higher health disparities experienced by people of color in our state were highlighted during the pandemic. My organization and many others have worked tirelessly for the last year to address these issues the pandemic put a shining light on the existing health inequalities in accessing healthcare.

During pandemic Maine has the worst racial and ethnic disparities on COVID-19. Lack of access for coverage has been a significant factor for many low-income immigrants and marginalized communities. Most of them are frontline workers and during a pandemic they are more vulnerable to the virus because of the type of work they do and because lack of health care can lead to health conditions that make COVID-19 more dangerous for them.

There are a few programs that can support immigrants without coverage, like emergency Maine Care or hospital, free care, however these do not cover preventive care., Maine immigrants without coverage have to wait until they get severely sick and run to the emergency room. If you pass this bill, all of the immigrant population in Maine who are not covered through Maine Care will see those gaps in coverage closed. They will finally have access to needed health care like all other Mainers.

Thank you!