



**Testimony in Support of LD 1523, *An Act To Establish the Trust for a Healthy Maine***

**February 9, 2022**

Good morning Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services. My name is Kathy Kilrain del Rio, and I'm the Advocacy & Programs Director for Maine Equal Justice, a nonprofit legal aid provider working to increase economic security, opportunity, and equity for people in Maine. Today I am testifying in support of LD 1523, *An Act To Establish the Trust for a Healthy Maine* as amended.

A robust health care system that will ensure all Mainers with low incomes can lead healthy lives requires an investment in both public health prevention programs *and* comprehensive MaineCare services. For that reason, Maine Equal Justice has long been a partner with members of the public health community in supporting the Fund for a Healthy Maine. We recognize and support the need to fund the projected shortfall in the Fund for a Healthy Maine to ensure needed prevention programs and other critical public health services continue at current rates. In the past, we have expressed concerns that the solution before you today would solve one problem while creating another for MaineCare, Drugs for the Elderly, Head Start and other necessary programs. However, it is our understanding that the amendment proposed by the sponsor today will move that funding to the baseline of the budget. With that change, we can support LD 1523 as amended.

I'd also like to express appreciation for the recognition of racism's impact on health and the creation of "Health equity and health improvement account". As the US CDC notes<sup>i</sup>:

A growing body of research shows that centuries of racism in this country has had a profound and negative impact on communities of color. The impact is pervasive and deeply embedded in our society—affecting where one lives, learns, works, worships and plays and creating inequities in access to a range of social and economic benefits—such as housing, education, wealth, and employment. These conditions—often referred to as social determinants of health—are key drivers of health inequities within communities of color, placing those within these populations at greater risk for poor health outcomes<sup>ii</sup>.

The results of these inequities are higher rates of illness and serious health problems for Black and Brown Mainers than for white Mainers. We saw this most recently when Maine had some of the highest racial disparities for COVID-19 in the nation. To reduce these types of disparities, we must create new systems to confront the systemic racism embedded in our health care system and so many aspects of our lives. This bill seeks to do that for our public health system.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak about this bill. I'm happy to answer any of your questions now and can be available for the work session as well. Thank you.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/healthequity/racism-disparities/index.html>

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/healthequity/racism-disparities/impact-of-racism.html>