



Testimony in Support of LD 1693, *An Act To Advance Health Equity, Improve the Well-being of All Maine People and Create a Health Trust*

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 1693, *An Act To Advance Health Equity, Improve the Well-being of All Maine People and Create a Health Trust* as amended. My testimony is focused on Parts A and B.

As I shared earlier today, 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 1693 as amended.

I'd also like to express appreciation for the recognition of racism's impact on health and proposals to improve health equity and directly address racial disparities both through funding and working with directly impacted communities. You've heard about the challenges of structural racism and the resulting disparities experienced by Black, Brown, and other Mainers of color. Those disparities result in worse health outcomes, more illness and serious health conditions, and earlier death. We must take action to increase equity by shifting the structures that continue to inflict these disparities. In addition to the human cost, which should be enough to drive us to action, there is also an economic cost to these disparities. Nationally, "disparities amount to approximately \$93 billion in excess medical care costs and \$42 billion in lost productivity per year as well as additional economic losses due to premature deaths."ⁱ This bill

seeks to improve health equity through the creation of a “Health equity and health improvement account” as well as an Office of Health Equity.

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.

ⁱ <https://www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/issue-brief/disparities-in-health-and-health-care-5-key-question-and-answers/>