



Improving the health status of Maine's seasonal workers and their families by providing culturally appropriate care and services.

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyers and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Allison Conroe and I live in Portland. I am here to present testimony from the Maine Mobile Health Program (MMHP) in support 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 Programs. MMHP supports LD 718 because we believe that providing MaineCare to everyone with low incomes will keep Maine families healthy and safe, as well as improve access and sustainability in the State's healthcare system.

For over 25 years, MMHP has addressed the health needs of migrant and seasonal workers and their families. We are the only nonprofit organization in Maine acting as a safety-net health provider for farmworkers. Annually, as a Federally Qualified Health Center, we provide mobile care to 1,300 patients in their communities. MMHP aims to reduce health disparities and inequities from Cumberland to Washington to Aroostook Counties. Since the implementation of the Affordable Care Act, we have enrolled hundreds of farmworkers in private insurance and MaineCare.

Farmworkers are the backbone of Maine's agricultural economy. Our patients rake blueberries, plant and pick strawberries, broccoli, and apples, make Christmas wreaths and harvest Christmas trees, as well as process lobsters and sea cucumbers. The vast majority (86% in 2020) of our patients live below the poverty line, despite their significant contributions to our economy.

We serve a diverse patient population, including individuals who would benefit from the proposed legislation. Even though many of these patients live, work and raise their families in Maine year-round, often they are ineligible for MaineCare. LD 718 would have a profound impact on our patients' ability to keep themselves and their families safe and healthy.

As the health center in the State with the highest uninsured rate at 93% in 2020, we have seen firsthand how the lack of access to insurance impacts health outcomes, delays critical care, as well as wreaks havoc on the medical system. Patients without insurance avoid lower-cost primary and preventative services which leads to increased utilization of Emergency Rooms and hospital stays. Our staff regularly report that our patients delay or avoid care because they fear they will be unable to pay the bill. Additionally, every uninsured patient that gains coverage, like MaineCare,



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relieves some of the burden on overstretched health center budgets and allows providers to operate in a more stable, sustainable model.

I'd like to share the story of an MMHP patient who was uninsured and needed an operation that could not be provided by our health center. This patient had already accrued outstanding hospital bills but he did not have the means to pay for them. The bills were in danger of going to collections and he was worried he would not be able to undergo the needed operation. I worked with the patient to try to find a financial assistance program that would help him get his operation and allow him to return to good health. First, we applied to the State but the patient was denied MaineCare. We then attempted to apply to the Marketplace for private insurance but he was again denied coverage. Finally, we tried the hospital Free Care system, but the hospital did not approve his application. At the end of the day, and after all that stress and effort, the patient did not receive the medical services he needed.

Our health center is required by law to provide care to anyone in need, regardless of how they came to Maine. We do not turn anyone away from our primary and preventive care services. We believe that our state's safety net system should do the same. Access to medical care is a problem that Maine has an obligation to address, and we believe our state should address this problem for everyone, not just a select group.

Please support LD 718 to keep our patients and their families safe and healthy. Thank you for your time.