



SUIT UP MAINE

April 15, 2021

Sen. Claxton, Rep. Meyer, and honorable members of the Committee on Health and Human Services:

My name is Kelli Whitlock Burton and I am a resident of Waldoboro and co-leader of Suit Up Maine, an independent, all-volunteer constituent action group representing more than 5,000 Mainers in all 16 counties. I offer this testimony 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 Program.

Maine has a long history of welcoming immigrants to our state, and we have always been the better for it. So, in 1996 when the federal government barred most immigrants from participating in social safety net programs such as Medicaid, Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and Temporary Aid for Needy Families, Maine stepped in with state funds to ensure immigrants living here had access to the care and aid they needed. That support for new Mainers ended with restrictions included in a budget passed in 2011, which stripped health coverage, food assistance, and other aid from many immigrants. Legislators have the opportunity now to right part of that wrong by extending MaineCare and Children's Health Insurance Program coverage to noncitizen residents who are ineligible for coverage under the federal health programs, regardless of their immigration status. This includes people awaiting asylum decisions, undocumented residents, and permanent residents (green card holders) who have lived in for less than five years.

In 2017, when the majority of Maine voters passed Medicaid expansion, they demonstrated their desire to expand MaineCare to more Mainers who need it, regardless of where they were born. Perhaps that is because Mainers realize that providing access to health care to those in need is not only the moral thing to do, it is cost effective. Research suggests that providing coverage to noncitizens has positive economic impacts, as delayed care or lack of prenatal care can result in higher

long-term costs.¹ Alternatively, providing Medicaid coverage to children has been shown to reduce the risk of chronic health conditions, fewer hospitalizations, and better overall health in adulthood.² Passing LD 718 also recognizes the importance of immigrants to Maine's economy. Immigrant-owned businesses generated \$60.8 million in business income in 2014 and employed nearly 15,000 Mainers.³ In 2019, immigrant-led households in Maine contributed \$437.7 million in federal taxes and \$193.9 million in state and local taxes, and had \$1.4 billion in spending power.⁴

It is time to correct a decade-old wrong and honor the will of Maine voters by extending health care coverage to all Mainers who need it, regardless of where they were born. I urge you to support LD 718 and vote Ought to Pass.

Kelli Whitlock Burton
Co-Leader, Suit Up Maine

¹ Gostin L. Is Affording Undocumented Immigrants Health Coverage a Radical Proposal? JAMA Health Forum. Published online September 5, 2019. doi:10.1001/jamahealthforum.2019.0034.

<https://jamanetwork.com/channels/health-forum/fullarticle/2759639>

² Park E, et.al. Jeopardizing a Sound Investment: Why Short-Term Cuts to Medicaid Coverage During Pregnancy and Childhood Could Result in Long-Term Harm. The Commonwealth Fund. 2020 Dec. 8. <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/publications/issue-briefs/2020/dec/short-term-cuts-medicaid-long-term-harm>

³ The Contributions of New Americans in Maine. New American Economy Research Fund. 2016 Aug. 3. <http://research.newamericaneconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/nae-me-report.pdf>

⁴ Immigrants in Maine Fact Sheet. American Immigration Council. 2020 Aug. 6. <https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/immigrants-in-maine>