

March 28, 2023

Testimony of Katie Rutherford, Executive Director of Frannie Peabody Center  
In support of LD 199 - An Act to Improve the Health of Maine Residents by  
Removing Exclusions to the MaineCare Program  
Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Health and Human Services Committee,

My name is Katie Rutherford and I am testifying on behalf of Frannie Peabody Center, Maine's largest HIV/AIDS services organization, in support of LD 199 as it improves the health of Maine residents.

Frannie Peabody Center is the state's largest community-based provider of comprehensive services for people living with HIV/AIDS in Maine through medical case management, behavioral health counseling, housing assistance, as well as low-barrier, free HIV and Hepatitis C testing. I am here today, not to discuss what could or should be possible when insurance gaps are removed, but to tell you that we see the positive outcomes of this access every day. Consider us a pilot program with over 30 years of experience and evidence to support this proposal.

As an agency, we are able to see things from a unique perspective as we administer federal programs that extend healthcare coverage to people regardless of immigration status for individuals living with HIV/AIDS. These national programs came into existence as a result of the broad acknowledgement that healthcare coverage is key to achieving health and financial stability. When clients come to us with acute medical needs and numerous barriers, our ability to link them to a form of insurance is a catalyst to establishing stability and having the physical health and capacity to work on housing and employment goals. These are absolutely the building blocks to financial independence.

Alexandra, for example, had experienced severe trauma and escaped persecution in her home country. She arrived in Maine with intense chronic medical complications and was staying in a motel with her four children and no income. We immediately connected her to a form of health insurance and linked her to providers. She quickly became healthy enough to search for housing, gained the physical strength to take care of her children, and took the necessary steps to obtain steady employment. She then became eligible for health insurance through her workplace, and began earning more than what would have made her income eligible for MaineCare. That initial coverage made all this possible. Without it, she would have had insurmountable emergency costs, unattainable life-saving medications, and the cycle of poverty and ongoing health risk would have continued for Alexandra and her children. For Alexandra, her eligibility was directly related to her HIV status, but her story is similar to so many individuals without access to affordable care. Opening the door to health coverage by removing exclusions to the MaineCare Program is what is best for the health, well-being and success of our communities.

I urge you to support LD 199 to close these gaps in coverage and ensure *all* Mainers have access to the care they need through the MaineCare Program.