



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

**State of Maine | 131st Legislature
Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services
Testimony of Laura Valencia Orozco on behalf of Maine Mobile Health Program
March 28, 2023**

Supporting:

**LD 199, "An Act to Improve the Health of Maine Residents
by Removing Exclusions to the MaineCare Program"**

Sponsored by Speaker Rachel Talbot Ross

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Laura Valencia Orozco, and I am the Director of Behavioral Health at the Maine Mobile Health Program, a Federally Qualified Health Center that provides services to farmworkers and seafood processors and their families in Maine. At MMHP we welcome each of our patients regardless of their ability to pay or where they come from because we strongly believe that healthcare is a human right and immigration status has nothing to do with it.

As a behavioral health provider, I need to make appropriate referrals to other providers to support patients' overall health. If I am working with a patient who is covered MaineCare, I can make these referrals confidently knowing that this will not create a debilitating financial burden for them. However, that is not an option for a lot of our patients. In those cases, we have to watch our patients make the difficult choice between racking up high medical bills or only seeking care in dire emergencies.

In 2021, we had a patient from Central Maine working in agriculture get very sick with COVID-19. The patient worked seven days a week throughout the pandemic, had no sick time, and was the sole earner for a family of six. Because the patient had no MaineCare, the family had to make the difficult decision to wait and seek care until the patient was not able to breathe and had to be intubated.

When the patient was discharged, they immediately went back to work. In the meantime, the family had to suffer great financial stress and food insecurity, all while racking up a staggering medical bill. Now in our weekly sessions, the patient often talks about this medical bill and how they'll never be able to pay it off and the fear of the negative impact it will have on their family. They describe how hard it is to sleep or focus and feel successful at work because of the continuous medical bills they receive.



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During the pandemic, many of us had the opportunity to work remotely, get unemployment benefits, or get hazard pay, while most of our patients and other frontline workers had to continue working in hazardous conditions, upholding Maine's agricultural and seafood industries and ensuring that we had fresh food on our tables. It is now our time to show up for them by passing LD199.

It's inhumane that people are excluded from MaineCare, and I see the additional costs it creates for our health care system too. The amount of time we spend seeking out financial assistance takes away from the time we could be providing the behavioral health treatment we are trained and hired to do. Watching people choose between their life and staggering medical bills takes a significant toll on us as providers and contributes to high burn out. Passing LD 199 would not only help individual Mainers or their families, it would help our health care system and our workforce. This bill represents a better and more fair future for us all.

As a provider from the Maine Mobile Health Program, thank you for considering my comments. Please do not hesitate to contact me directly with any follow-up questions.

Sincerely,
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