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

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of LD 718.

My name is Jane Makela and I live in Falmouth. I submit this testimony on behalf of the Maine Unitarian Universalist State Advocacy Network, reflecting our fundamental principle of justice, equity and compassion in human relations. There is no justice, equity, **or** compassion in a healthcare system set up to help people without insurance or the means to pay for it, which then specifically excludes certain residents of our state for no reason other than their immigration status.

I am a retired lawyer now providing pro bono legal services to asylum seekers and other immigrants struggling to get a foothold in this country. I know that other categories of immigrants, such as those who are undocumented or have held a greencard for less than 5 years, also suffer under the current MaineCare exclusions, but I speak to the plight of asylum seekers who cannot access MaineCare until they actually receive a grant of asylum. I have witnessed how the complexity of the asylum process itself has magnified the harm to them from this exclusion.

Preparing an asylum application that will meet the rigorous tests for proving asylum eligibility can require **months** of effort. And when the application can finally be filed, most end up in the enormous—and growing, backlog at the U.S. Citizenship & Immigration Services (USCIS) or in immigration court. One of my pro bono clients filed her asylum application and is still waiting almost 7 years later for the USCIS interview at which she can present her claim.

She now has healthcare through her employer, but many asylum seekers who find work are not that lucky. Their healthcare needs go unattended, for them there is no such thing as preventative care or screening, and treatment requires a medical emergency or finding a hospital whose free care policy may cover their needs. Imagine if you and your family faced those obstacles in trying to get medical attention.

In almost all of our faith traditions, we are directed to welcome the stranger. Following that direction entails more than simply opening the door and saying “Fend for yourself until you and your family have been here long enough to earn the same level of concern, consideration and human dignity we accord to those not burdened by your immigration status.” LD 718 would have us say “Not only are you welcome, but we care that you remain healthy enough to survive and thrive as you make your home here with us”.

Thank you.