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May 20, 2013

Statement of Sara Gagné-Holmes, Executive Director, Maine Equal Justice Partners

Good Morning. Thank you for taking the time to join us this morning.

My name is Sara Gagné-Holmes. I'm the executive director of Maine Equal Justice Partners and one of the organizers of today's event.

Over the last couple of weeks, polling data from two Maine polling groups, the Maine People Resource Center and Critical Insights, has shown that Maine people overwhelmingly support accepting federal funds that are already set aside to insure 69,500 hard-working Maine people.

The people that stand to gain from having access to health care services come from many different walks of life.

They are childcare providers, fisherman, artists, construction workers, cashiers, waitresses, chamber maids, farmers, veterans and entrepreneurs.

We see them every day. They are our neighbors and friends, our family and the people across the street. They take care of our children and grow our food and help to make Maine a special place.

They all deserve to live long and healthy lives.

Today, the Cover Maine Now! Coalition is delivering nearly 3000 petitions to our elected representatives. The petitions urge lawmakers to accept federal funds set aside for Maine to provide health care coverage to more than 69,500 Mainers.

The Legislature and the governor have an opportunity right now to change lives. To help families be more secure. To stimulate our economy. To reduce insurance costs for business owners. To create jobs. And, most importantly, to save lives.

There are few matters of public policy that can have such a dramatic effect on so many people.

The Legislature and the governor have an opportunity to cover thousands of Maine people and to ensure that Maine's hospitals are paid the debt they are owed all at the same time.

To do one without the other would only solve half the problem.

Maine's hospitals deserve to be paid what is owed to them; however, their economic well-being and that of thousands of businesses and Maine people also depend on accepting these federal funds to cover more of Maine's working poor.

If Maine doesn't accept the federal funds already set aside under the Affordable Care Act, then an additional 24,500 Maine people will be uninsured as of January 1, 2014.

The health needs of these individuals will not disappear with their coverage. Instead, because they can't afford the cost of care, they will forego it until their health care needs become acute. Only when they can no longer stand the pain or provide for their families will they seek treatment. Without a primary care doctor they will turn to one of the most expensive places to seek care – hospital emergency rooms.

Hospitals struggle to absorb the current level of charity care and will be hard pressed to absorb the increase that they will see beginning in 2014. These increased costs will negatively impact Maine's economy by reducing growth and investment.

Accepting federal funding will result in net savings for Maine and will also help to stabilize Maine's hospitals. Together with efforts to repay millions of dollars in outstanding obligations, the legislation currently being considered will protect thousands of jobs today and into the future.

Health care shouldn't be a pawn in political gamesmanship. Republicans, Democrats, Independents, and Greens all need access to health care services to live healthy and productive lives.

We urge our policymakers to do the right thing by the people of Maine. The time is now. Accept the federal funds.