Senator Gratwick, Representative Hymanson, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: I am Whitney Parrish, Director of Policy and Program for the Maine Women’s Lobby. The Maine Women’s Lobby is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, statewide organization devoted to raising the economic, social, and political status of Maine’s 678,000 women and girls.

I am pleased to speak to you today in strong support of LD 1539, An Act To Provide Maine Children Access to Affordable Health Care, as it directly addresses two of our priority areas, access to health care and economic security.

Maine has the highest rate of uninsured children in New England and is slightly above the national average. Maine’s Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP), also known as MaineCare and CubCare, provides a critical, cost-effective way to deliver high-quality health care to Maine’s uninsured children, many of whom are living in or near poverty, and is a framework we can build upon to give coverage to young people who will benefit from consistent primary care. This reliable delivery of high-quality care, where children can build trust and rapport with their providers, ensures a healthy start in life and strong foundation for Maine children and families to thrive and succeed.

There are some key amendments to CubCare statute proposed by LD 1539 that are worth noting as they relate to supporting children and families in Maine. Parents, many of whom are already living in or close to poverty, would no longer pay for often burdensome premiums. These extra hundred dollars a year go a tremendous distance for parents working in lower income occupations. These parents are primarily women and often the primary earner, so the expansion of CHIP to more children and the waiving of premiums has a direct connection to ensuring economic security for Maine women and families.

Additionally, children would no longer be subject to a waiting period, and young people ages 19 and 20 would remain covered by CHIP. It is important to acknowledge that for many individuals experiencing mental health and substance use challenges, this high-stress time for young people is typically when the onset of symptoms begins. Supporting young people through their late teens and early twenties with high-quality, accessible, and consistent care is crucial to making sure our most vital resource, our
children, are supported as they enter adulthood and have every opportunity to be happy, well-adjusted, and competent Mainers.

When children thrive, society thrives. Ensuring that more children have health coverage will benefit not only them and their families, but all of us. We strongly urge you to vote ought to pass on LD 1539. Thank you for your time.