

Testimony from the Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition regarding:
LD564: "An Act to Improve Access to Civil Legal Services"
Sponsored By: Senator Anne Carney
Public Hearing: Tuesday, March 21, 2023 at 1:30pm

Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Tobin Williamson and I live in the city of Lewiston, Maine in Androscoggin County. I am the Advocacy Manager with the Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition (MIRC), a statewide network of almost 100 member organizations all working to enhance the lives of Maine's immigrant communities.

We are happy to support the Justice Action Group's Legislative Committee in their efforts to bridge the justice gap in Maine by supporting LD 564. Many of our state's most vulnerable residents would rely on civil legal aid organizations should the need for representation ever arise. As a small advocacy-focused organization, MIRC does not provide legal services; instead, we refer people to organizations like the Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project, Pine Tree Legal Assistance, and Maine Equal Justice. These organizations are overworked, understaffed, and underpaid, but they provide such incredible services to people who need them for civil cases.

Unfortunately, civil legal organizations desperately need more capacity to do the kind of work they do (e.g., child custody, domestic violence, asylum applications, evictions, and more). People seek services from organizations like these when they are at some of the lowest points in their lives, facing sometimes a literal matter of life or death. The demand for adequate legal representation for low-income individuals far exceeds the supply, and many people are unable to get the services they need in the current climate.

Rather than the "justice for some" that is available now, MIRC wants to see equal access to "justice for all." Maine needs to invest more in access to civil legal aid in order for our state's low-income residents to have legal representation available to them in civil cases. Therefore, we highly encourage the passage of LD 564: An Act to Improve Access to Civil Legal Services. Thank you for your consideration of this important matter.

Tobin Williamson
Lewiston, ME
MIRC Advocacy Manager

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