

Testimony to the Committee on Innovation, Development Economic Advancement and Business on LD 787

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Xavier Botana, Advocacy Advisor, IntWork

Honorable Chairs Curry and Roberts. Distinguished members of the Committee On Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business. Thank you to Representative Bennet for sponsoring this bill and for the opportunity to provide testimony to register my strong support for passage of **LD 787**.

My name is Xavier Botana. I am currently working with IntWork, a Maine company that specializes in helping employers find and hire qualified, local, diverse professionals — primarily BIPOC, bilingual, & immigrant — candidates.

Until recently, I was the superintendent of the Portland Public Schools, the district's largest and most diverse school district serving We 6500 PK-12 students and over 2000 adult learners. The overwhelming majority of those adult learners are recent arrivals in this country as are about a third of the district's PK-12 students.

I also serve as Co-Chair of Thrive 2027, a collective action collaboration of many businesses, government agencies and non profit organizations in Southern Maine under the umbrella of the United Way of Southern Maine.

As you might imagine from those roles, I'm more informed than the average person on issues affecting new arrivals. Over the course of my tenure as superintendent in Portland, I was always taken and dismayed by the lack of a comprehensive system of support for new arrivals from other countries coming into our communities.

I want to be clear that there is a great deal of good work that is happening. More than any other place I've worked, there is a true commitment to supporting and leveraging all that immigrants coming to Maine bring. There is broad recognition that as a State we need these families to thrive by fulfilling their full potential as members of our communities.

But as an advocate, I found the patchwork of services confounding, overlapping and above all missing strong leadership and coordination at the state level. And that's me, someone who is relatively well informed and savvy. Imagine what that is like for someone who is new to the country, speaks limited English and does not have the

social capital and networks to navigate the maze. LD 787 provides you with an opportunity to establish a system to solve that problem.

In addition to the roles that I mentioned earlier, I have a very personal connection and understanding of the value of such a system. My family came as refugees from Cuba to the United States when I was three years old. At that time, there was a concerted and coordinated effort to provide a system of supports.

Then, as now, there was a strong belief that we were worth investing in and would add value to our new country. When we arrived, we were given assistance in finding housing, enrolling in school, getting work. And that support was critical in helping us to enter the mainstream as a family and fulfill our potential. That investment in us has been returned many times over in our contributions as a family to the workforce, as citizens and as taxpayers.

I see my family in so many of the families that I have had the privilege of interacting with in my time in Maine. They want to contribute. They want to fulfill their potential. They need us to figure out how to create a clear, transparent and well articulated system of support that connects them to housing, healthcare, training and eventually productive employment.

Please take this opportunity to act to create the type of system that benefitted my family and so many other refugee families over the years. If approved, I can pledge that the team at IntWork -- who collectively bring dozens of years building successful systems to support immigrant inclusion -- would be happy to share our experience and insights to assist in developing reliable processes and systems to help the state of Maine successfully and efficiently welcome and incorporate new immigrants

Thank you for considering my testimony.

Xavier E. Botana
15 Brookside Lane
Portland, ME 04103

