



AGC MAINE

THE CONSTRUCTION ASSOCIATION

Testimony of Matthew Marks in Support of LD 1050

“Resolve, Directing the Department of Labor to Request a Federal Waiver to Allow Presumptive Work Eligibility for Asylum Seekers”
Joint Committee on Labor and Housing
March 21, 2023

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor and Housing my name is Matthew Marks, I am a Principal at Cornerstone Government Affairs, and here today to speak on behalf of my client The Associated General Contractors of Maine. AGC Maine is a statewide commercial construction trade association and a Chapter of AGC America which was founded in 1918 with 27,000 contractors, suppliers, and service providers.

The failure of federal policy advancement places asylum seekers in a situation where they cannot seek employment as they wait for the US Government to process their paperwork. Today it’s estimated that 8,000 to 10,000 people are living in Maine and not eligible to work. AGC Maine has long supported reforms that address barriers to solving this challenge and supported Federal legislation to correct the situation.

As companies work tirelessly to solve workforce challenges, among our ongoing population challenges it is shortsighted to keep workers sidelined. While that challenge is difficult, the families who are living here should be given the chance to support themselves and their families who are part of our community. The US Immigration and Customs Service allows for asylum seekers to apply for a work permit known as “Employment Authorization Document,” (EAD) 150 days after they have applied for asylum. An individual can apply for an asylum application decision may be made 180 days after application.

According to TRAC, a nonpartisan, nonprofit data research center affiliated with the [Newhouse School of Public Communications](#) and the [Whitman School of Management](#), both at [Syracuse University](#), the latest available data reveal that the number of asylum seekers waiting for asylum hearings in the U.S. has now reached at least 1,565,966 individuals. About half of this total, or 787,882, are waiting for hearings before judges in the Immigration Courts housed in the Department of Justice. The other half, or 778,084 asylum seekers, are waiting for hearings before United States Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) asylum officers who are housed in the Department of Homeland Security.

While this resolution might not correct the issue, it is imperative action continue to elevate the discussion and assert that Maine is actively seeking solutions. The costs of assisting asylum seekers continue to rise as meal costs, housing, and medical expenses rise with our recent inflation impacting federal, state, and local budgets. But the true cost here is we have families, skilled workers, and people who want to be part of Maine’s workforce, support their families, and be integrated with our communities.

I urge the Committee to pass this resolve and send a unified message to correct this problem.