



## Maine Immigrant & Refugee Services (MEIRS)

**Bartlett Office**

256 Bartlett St.  
Lewiston, ME 04240

**Ph:** (207) 782-0260

**Fax:** (207) 782-0261

**Main St Office**

217 Main St  
Lewiston, ME 04240

**Phone:** (207) 782-0260

**Fax:** (207) 744-7470

**Mailing Address**

POBOX 7149  
Lewiston, ME 042243

**Website:** [www.meirs.org](http://www.meirs.org)

**Email:** [info@meirs.org](mailto:info@meirs.org)

---

*Bridging gaps. Building futures*

January 15, 2024

To the Honorable Members of the Legislative Committee,

**Subject:** Testimony in Support of L.D. 1995: An Act to Bolster Maine's Workforce and Economy

I am Rilwan Osman, the Executive Director of Maine Immigrant & Refugee Services (MEIRS) in Lewiston Maine. Today, I express our strong support for L.D. 1995: An Act to Bolster Maine's Workforce and Economy by Increasing Assistance for Parents Pursuing Education and Employment and by Indexing Unemployment Benefits to the Unemployment Rate.

At MEIRS, we have been dedicatedly working with families through the Whole Family Services. As the only community-based organization primarily serving immigrant and refugee families, we have observed the transformative impact of these services, as evidenced by:

- ❖ A multi-cultural coaching team at MEIRS providing services in multiple languages, catering to the unique needs of Maine's diverse communities.
- ❖ Higher rates of housing instability among New Mainer families working with MEIRS, in comparison to others in the Whole Family Services.
- ❖ 58% of adults and 49% of families at MEIRS having adequate childcare.
- ❖ A 20% increase in healthcare access and a 100% increase in stable housing for families enrolled for more than six months, compared to newly enrolled families.
- ❖ 90% of the families we assist received their work authorization and commenced working.

Currently, we have 70 families enrolled in Whole Family Services, with an additional 12 families on our waitlist. These families, having faced traumatic experiences before coming to the USA, greatly benefit from the comprehensive approach of Whole Family Services.

One impactful success story involves Angelo and Angie from Angola, who came to MEIRS in February 2023 with their children. We enrolled them in Whole Family Services, developed a comprehensive plan for each family member, assisted with their asylum and work permit applications, and enrolled their children in public schools and childcare. Both Angelo and Angie are now employed full time. The entire family now has health insurance, and both parents are pursuing their HiSET diplomas.

Additionally, I wish to share the story of Aamiina from Afghanistan, a mother separated from her husband and two of her children. She enrolled in Whole Family Services with MEIRS, seeking a stable living environment for her and her two children in Maine. Aamiina's Family Coach helped her find an apartment close to a hospital and the MEIRS office, ensuring easy access to necessary services. This stable living situation led to a significant improvement in her child's medical condition. MEIRS also aided Aamiina in her immigration process, resulting in her being granted asylum and the potential reunification with her family she left behind in Afghanistan.

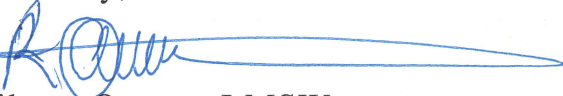
Aamiina's story, like many others we encounter, underscores the need for increased support through L.D. 1995. This bill is vital to extend our reach and resources to more families who are on their journey to rebuild their lives and contribute to the richness of our community.

However, our capacity is challenged by staff-client ratios, resulting in 12 families currently on our waitlist. We advocate for increased support through L.D. 1995 to address the needs of these families.

Your support for L.D. 1995 represents not just aid to these families but a commitment to the strength and diversity of Maine's workforce and economy.

Thank you for considering the impact and potential of your support for L.D.1995.

Sincerely,



Rilwan Osman, LMSW\_cc

Executive Director

Maine Immigrant & Refugee Services(MEIRS)

