



**Testimony of Jena Jones on Behalf of  
the Maine Council on Aging to the Committee on  
State and Local Government**

**In Favor of LD 2167 – An Act to Develop Maine's  
Economy and Strengthen Its Workforce by  
Establishing an Office of New Americans**

Provided on January 30, 2024

Greetings, Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and the members of the Committee on State and Local Government.

My name is Jena Jones and I am the Director of Policy and Advocacy at the Maine Council on Aging (MCOA). The MCOA is a broad, multidisciplinary network of over 140 organizations, businesses, municipalities, and older community members working to ensure we can all live healthy, engaged and secure lives with choices and opportunities as we age at home and in community settings. I am testifying in favor of LD 2167.

Working-age populations in many countries are shrinking and shifting as international birthrates slow and life expectancy grows. Maine is on the leading edge of the demographic shift in the United States, with a shrinking working-age population and a robust and growing population of older people.<sup>1</sup> This trend is only expected to grow within this country and worldwide. Thus, it is imperative for Maine to be forward-thinking about engaging older people in the workforce longer, attracting and retaining younger workers from other parts of the country and the world, and effectively using technology to bridge workforce gaps.

As we consider what it will take to attract younger workers to our state, we must acknowledge that we're competing with every other state, and other countries, including our sister to the north, for these same workers. To be successful, Maine needs to be actively and intentionally welcoming to New Americans and to implement policies that support their successful integration into our communities, workplaces, and economy. To make this happen, we must have a strong plan that acknowledges and addresses known challenges, willing partners able to implement solutions and to support the process, and metrics to measure success. LD 2167 is the start to this intentional process and is long overdue.

Success also means not doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results. According to PHI, the national Direct Care Workforce (DCW) resource and advocacy center, immigrant workers comprise 27% of the nation's DCW population and are more likely to remain

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<sup>1</sup> (McInerney, 2021)

in the long-term care workforce longer than U.S.-born citizens.<sup>2</sup> In Maine, that number is closer to 10% but as more immigrants move to Maine, this percentage will grow toward the national average. Because we must emphasize New Mainers thriving, not just surviving, the Office of New Americans must specifically focus attention on lifting the economic profile of these entry-level jobs and growing their connection to healthcare jobs. The aims of LD 2167 will do just that.

The current challenges facing older Mainers in need of care and support services have become so severe that the lack of DCWs is causing increases in older adult homelessness and unnecessary hospitalizations, and costing our economy more than one billion dollars annually in lost economic activity.<sup>3</sup> In our efforts to ensure access to quality care and support services for all Mainers, we must ensure we are prioritizing every opportunity to grow the availability of DCWs. Making Maine a more welcoming place for New Americans and ensuring DCW jobs are good-paying and connected to other desperately needed healthcare jobs will benefit all Mainers, boost our economy, and increase the vibrancy of our communities.

I urge you to support LD 2167.

Thank you.

Jena Jones

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<sup>2</sup> (Espinoza, 2023)

<sup>3</sup> (Phillips & Phillips, 2023)