

I am writing in urgent support of Governor Mill's plan to create an Office of New Americans.

I have worked with people from outside Maine for a long time. An emerita faculty member from the University of Maine, I taught writing for close to fifty years to first-year students and considered myself lucky when international students appeared in my classes. . Almost always, they were intelligent and committed to their work. Moving to a new country to study in a language that is not your own is challenging in all ways. One must leave behind everyday comforts and supports and learn to rely on and to transform habits and disciplines developed over many years. With rare exceptions, the international students I knew never disappointed me or themselves or their classmates. They made our discussions more interesting; their dedication to learning was infectious. Since retirement, I have gotten to know New Americans through Literacy Volunteers and through the Education Committee of the Maine Multicultural Center. Like the University students I once hoped for in my classes, the adults I have come to know through these organizations are dedicated to the work we do together and committed to making new lives for themselves in America.

That commitment seems especially sharp in relation to Maine. I am right now working with an Asylee from Turkey, a 53-year engineer, who chose Maine deliberately. His first stop in the United States was New Jersey where, he said, he could have lived surrounded by Turkish Immigrants. He would have had easy access to Turkish food and clothing and plenty of people who would have helped him find work. But since living in America had been a lifelong dream of his, he chose not to stay in a place that would let him think he had never left Turkey. He did some research, came across the then work of Dr. Nirav Shah, and decided to give Maine a chance. Dr. Shah's work persuaded him that Maine was a responsible state that cared about its citizens; he thought it would be possible to find work he could do and communities he could enter that would value what he had to offer. His hopes have not yet been realized, but he is, at least for now, determined to stay and work in Maine. For now.

His story is hardly unique. I know of and have worked with others like him, men and women with professional degrees and experience who wind up driving for GrubHub or Uber because employers will not consider their applications or who enroll in training programs for jobs far beneath their capabilities because they have families to support and need to find work quickly. Such situations are painful not only because of the frustration they cause new Mainers feel but also because of the loss to Maine of their experience and talent. And then there are the implications for Maine's future. Workers who wind up with jobs far beneath their interests and abilities are not likely to stay. Once they get a little money together, they will move to states with smoother career paths. And even if they stay, their children certainly will not. If Maine is

hoping for a stable and sustaining workforce, it needs to do a better job than it has so far of welcoming those who have chosen it despite its high sales tax and challenging winters.

The Governor's plan for an Office of New Americans promises to provide a dignified and intelligent welcome to immigrants courageous enough to come to Maine. All of it is strong. What I like best are its ongoing references to strengthening language preparation, to coordinating existing services, and to establishing private/public partnerships. The organizations I know—Literacy Volunteers and the Education Committee of the Maine Multicultural Center—are staffed primarily by volunteers with uneven training. We do our best, and our hearts are surely in the right places, but we can't do enough. With money to provide more professionals and to coordinate existing services, those organizations could find ways to strengthen and focus the work they are already doing. Establishing private/public partnerships is equally important, especially in relation to writing. Anyone who has thought seriously about language or texts knows that professionals use language differently. Engineers' reports or environmental impact statements do not sound like the reports health care workers provide at the ends of their shifts. The most efficient and effective way for new workers to learn the language skills they need is for them to be learning both from professionals in language learning and from people working in the careers they want to enter. The plan's support for public/private partnerships would make that happen.

I know there is much more in the Governor's plan to praise. The coordination it looks forward to should ease problems with housing, with legal advice, with schooling of children, and much more. I have commented on what I know best. Language is central to who we are and how we think and how we enter into a workplace. The Governor's plan promises effective ways to address that essential dimension of New American's life in Maine. The legislature needs to support it.

Thank you for your time.