



*January 30, 2024*

*To: Members of the Committee on State and Local Government*

*From: Rich André, Director, State and Local Initiatives, American Immigration Council*

**Re: HP 1387, LD 2167: An Act to Develop Maine's Economy and Strengthen Its Workforce by Establishing an Office of New Americans**

Good afternoon Chair Stover, Chair Nangle, and members of the committee,

My name is Rich André, and I am the Director of State and Local Initiatives at the American Immigration Council (the Council). The Council works to create a more welcoming America – one that provides a fair immigration process for new Americans and adopts policies that take into account the vital contributions they make to the U.S. economy.

I am submitting this letter in strong support of HP 1387, LD 2167, regarding the creation of the Office of New Americans in Maine. Over the past several years, my organization has worked with leaders in government, business, and civil society to establish and support similar state-level offices across the country. To facilitate the social, economic, and cultural integration of immigrant and refugee communities, these offices work across state agencies and community-based organizations to ensure equitable access to services and information; engage the private sector to attract and retain international talent and secure employment; and convene relevant stakeholders to best coordinate efforts.

Maine has the opportunity to join a growing number of states that recognize the return on investing in new American integration. In the past three years alone, Colorado, Maryland, Oregon, and North Dakota enacted bipartisan legislation to establish such statewide offices, bringing the total number of states with these offices or senior advisor positions to 19.

These offices are focused on ensuring the successful integration of new Americans into local communities and workforces. For example, the Office of Global Michigan worked with their Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs to create 44 licensing guides over three years to help internationally trained professionals attain licenses for in-demand jobs, including doctors, teachers, and cosmetologists. In 2020, the New York Office of New Americans launched Immigrants Can Code, a digital literacy project to ensure that immigrants have access to digital literacy education to meet workforce demands. In Colorado, the Office of New Americans established a Virtual, Career-Aligned English as a Second Language (VCESL) program to provide career and sector-specific adult English language courses to help newcomers build the skills they need to contribute to the state's workforce.

In collaboration with World Education Services, my organization convenes these offices through the Office of New Americans State Network. Erica Carley Harris, Policy Analyst for the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and the Future, is an active participant in the network, where she has learned best practices from her counterparts across the country. With Erica's experience and expertise, Maine is well-

positioned to create an Office of New Americans to facilitate the full integration of the state's vibrant immigrant and refugee communities to the benefit of all Mainers.

To help illustrate why this issue is important and why it makes sense to think of an Office of New Americans as an economic integration and workforce issue, my organization conducted quantitative research using data from the 2021 American Community Survey to highlight the impact immigrants and refugees already have in Maine. What we found is quite striking:

- **Maine is home to a small but vital community of nearly 52,000 immigrants and refugees, making up about 3.8 percent of the state's population.** This community is critical to the state's future workforce: 69.2 percent of new Mainers are of working age (16-64 years of age) compared to 62.4 percent of their U.S.-born counterparts.
- **New Mainers paid over \$600 million in taxes in 2021 — including nearly \$200 million in state and local taxes** — and held \$1.5 billion in spending power that is reinjected into the state's economy.
- **More than half the state's immigrants have become naturalized citizens.** As neighbors, business owners, taxpayers, and workers, immigrants are an integral part of Maine's diverse and thriving communities and make extensive contributions that benefit all.

Maine has the opportunity to maximize this economic impact, invest in the state's future workforce, and ensure the full integration of immigrants and refugees. I encourage the Committee to support the creation of the Maine Office of New Americans.

Rich André

Director, State and Local Initiatives

American Immigration Council