



DATE: Jan. 30, 2024  
TO: Joint Standing Committee on State & Local Government  
FROM: Samantha Warren, UMS Director of Government & Community Relations  
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RE: **LD 2167, An Act to Develop Maine's Economy and Strengthen Its Workforce by Establishing an Office of New Americans**

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Senator Nagle, Representative Stover and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on State & Local Government: My name is Samantha Warren and I am the Director of Government Relations for the state's largest driver of educational attainment and economic development, the University of Maine System (UMS), and a proud alumna of the University of Maine at Farmington and the University of Maine. I write on behalf of UMS in support of LD 2167, *An Act to Develop Maine's Economy and Strengthen Its Workforce by Establishing an Office of New Americans*. I know you will also hear from other members of our university community who have lived experience and extensive history working directly to strengthen and grow pathways to opportunity for other New Americans, and who also strongly support this legislation.

Earlier this month as part of the Maine Development Foundation bus tour visit to the University of Maine at Augusta's Brunswick Center, members of the Legislature had the honor to hear from recent UMA graduate Odette Zouri. Odette came to this country in 2016 from Burkina Faso, where she had earned a Master's degree and worked in the Ministry of the Environment. A mother of two, her pathway to the American Dream began first at a community college and then continued through UMA, where she achieved her Bachelor's of Science in Nursing. She now works in the cardio-thoracic med surg unit at Maine Medical Center and at Midcoast Hospital. She told your colleagues that aside from coming to America, coming to UMA was the best decision she'd made in her life. If you have a heart attack in southern Maine, she may just be the person who helps save your life

Odette is just one example of the important contributions New Americans are making to our state's workforce and communities. To realize even more success stories like hers, **Maine must better coordinate its resources to ensure they are optimized and meet the needs that have been identified by both New Americans and Maine employers.**

For this reason, UMS was proud to partner with the Mills' Administration to serve on the working group that developed the detailed plan that led to LD 2167. Our System supports the creation of a permanent Office of New Americans and is committed to partnering with that office and other stakeholders on this essential work for Maine's future. It's also why UMS has undertaken our own efforts to remove barriers and strengthen programs and services for immigrant-origin and foreign-trained professionals, consistent with [our new strategic plan](#) and Maine's 10-year economic strategy.

For example, the University of Maine, the University of Maine at Fort Kent and the University of Maine at Machias recently launched [Finish Strong](#) to provide tailored support including intensive English language training and personal advising to enable New Americans and other adult learners to quickly complete their door-opening degree and get into the state's workforce. Through its Intensive English Institute, UMaine educates and empowers New Americans with the language development and cultural knowledge to be successful in engaging in Maine's workforce and communities, including through both campus and community programming for international students and immigrants.

There is [a similar Intensive English Language Program at the University of Southern Maine](#). That university, which has campuses in two communities with large immigrant populations (Lewiston and Portland), has a newly created position of Global Talent Navigator, who is in the process of developing a comprehensive plan for USM to better serve New Americans. Draft recommendations focus on strengthening employer and community partnerships, credential evaluation and transfer, affordability including through the promotion of employer tuition assistance and expansion of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

New Americans are already making vital contributions to our campuses, companies and communities and they are bringing much needed talent and innovation to Maine's economy. Greater State-level and statewide coordination will leverage our collective efforts — like those within our System noted above — to harness the incredible promise of this population, for the benefit of all Mainers.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of LD 2167. Please let me know if I can provide additional information on behalf of Maine's public universities.