

Testimony of the Maine Immigrants Rights Coalition (MIRC) on LD 210

Sponsor: Representative Drew Gattine

Public Hearing: Monday, February 24th, 2025, at 2:00 PM

Presented to the Committees of Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services

Sen. Rotundo, Sen. Ingerwersen, Rep. Gattine, Rep. Meyer, and members of the Committees of Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Health and Human Services.

My name is Ruben Torres, and I serve as the Advocacy Manager for the Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition (MIRC). I am here today on behalf of our coalition of over 110 member organizations to testify neither for nor against LD 210 "An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027", but to express concerns regarding Part VV.

Maine's state-funded Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) exist because our state has recognized the gaps in federal assistance programs that exclude certain immigrants, even when they are lawfully present. These programs are not handouts—they are critical tools that allow families to survive while working toward economic self-sufficiency.

Under Part VV, a parent who just received work authorization but has yet to find a job would immediately lose food assistance. A worker who has been laid off—through no fault of their own—would be left with no support for their family. Children in these households would go hungry. And when people can't meet their basic needs, it doesn't make them more employable—it makes survival their full-time job. The notion that cutting off food assistance will incentivize employment is not supported by research. This change assumes that permission to work equals immediate employment. However, the reality for immigrants in Maine is much more complicated.

This proposal also contains a deeper injustice: Immigrants pay sales taxes, property taxes (directly or through rent), and, for those with work authorization, state income taxes. They are told that their tax dollars can support public services, but they cannot access them in times of need. This sends a clear message: immigrants are welcome to contribute to Maine's economy but not to benefit from the programs their taxes help fund.

MIRC urges this committee to reject Part VV and maintain the current hardship exception for state-funded SNAP and TANF. Maine has set goals to end hunger by 2030 and grow its workforce. These priorities cannot be achieved if we take away the very resources that help people get on their feet.

Thank you for your attention to this issue.

Work Cited:

- American Immigration Council State Profile *Immigrants in Maine* Accessed. January 31st, 2025. <https://map.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/locations/maine/>
- Cromidas, R. (2025, February 24) *Job confidence is dropping again*. LinkedIn News. <https://www.linkedin.com/news/story/job-confidence-is-dropping-again-6327924>
 - More than half (53%) of Americans actively looking for a new job have been on the hunt for six months or longer... over one in three (34%) have been searching for at least a year — if not longer.
- Davis, C. Guzman, M. Sifre, E. (2024, July 30) *Tax Payments by Undocumented Immigrants*. Institute on Taxation and Economic Policy. <https://itep.org/undocumented-immigrants-taxes-2024/>
 - Undocumented immigrants in Maine contributed \$15.6 million in state and local taxes in 2024.
- Dube, A. (2021, July 18). *Early impacts of the expiration of pandemic unemployment insurance programs*. <https://arindube.com/2021/07/18/early-impacts-of-the-expiration-of-pandemic-unemployment-insurance-programs/>
- Hickey, S. M., & Cooper, D. (2021, August 24). *Cutting unemployment insurance benefits did not boost job growth*. Economic Policy Institute. <https://www.epi.org/blog/cutting-unemployment-insurance-benefits-did-not-boost-job-growth-july-state-jobs-data-show-a-widespread-recovery/>
- U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2020, January 22). *Labor force statistics from the current population survey*. U.S. Department of Labor. <https://www.bls.gov/cps/aa2019/cpsaat31.htm>
 - An analysis of the long-term unemployment rate in the United States by race and ethnicity during the economic peak prior to the pandemic shows that the average duration of unemployment for white workers was 20 weeks, compared to 26 weeks for Black workers. Unemployment rates also vary due to external economic forces and can be higher in different areas, particularly in rural areas.
- For any questions please feel free to contact Ruben Torres at rtorres@maineimmigrantrights.org