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I am writing this testimony in support of the legislation to provide funding for the Maine Multicultural Center in Bangor. My name is Nancy Jacobson and I have been a resident of the Bangor area for 35 years and have worked with immigrants for 24 years as a teacher and as a volunteer. I have been a volunteer with MMCC for several years.

The importance of MMCC stems from both its unique role in supporting immigrants to the Bangor area as well as the importance of immigrants to our community, culturally and economically.

Catholic Charities of Maine created a Refugee Resettlement Area here in 2022. Since that time, MMCC has taken an important role in supporting over 200 refugees, asylum seekers and voluntary immigrants who have come to the area. CCM has a limited staff to help refugees in very important but specific ways when they first arrive in the area. MMCC staff and volunteers provide broad and ongoing assistance until the family is ready to be independent. The staff assists with legal and business paperwork, helps register both children and adults for school and training programs, connects immigrants to services and resources in the community, furnishes homes for the newly arrived immigrants, and recruits, trains and supports volunteers. MMCC volunteers help with attending appointments, shopping, transportation, learning about the area, learning English, learning to drive, and generally helping the new arrivals integrate.

MMCC is the only organization to help asylum seekers, who have even more diverse and complex needs and have many fewer of the supports that refugees have. Meanwhile, many of the voluntary immigrants come with jobs but need help finding their way to resources, integrating into the community and so appreciate the welcoming that MMCC volunteers provide.

Above are the supports that MMCC provides to immigrants. At the same time, newcomers support our community in important ways economically. We know that Maine has a declining population and in the Bangor area we have had difficulty filling needed workers both for simple and skilled labor. Immigrants provide both and research shows that a higher percentage of immigrants go on to open their own businesses than native-born Americans. Immigrants also help maintain the population in our communities and schools.

Then there are the cultural benefits to our community from incorporating immigrants. Americans often say we are a country of immigrants. How better for us to appreciate our roots and teach our children about those roots than to welcome immigrants who are eager to improve their lives, who show us a can-do and brave approach, who need our help and teach us about being compassionate, and who are ready to share with us about their home country's language, food, culture, politics, religion and more. How better to broaden our own lives? I speak as a teacher and parent when I say that having these children and families in our schools and communities enriches our lives through experiences that we could only previously imagine from Maine.