

TO:

The Honorable Joseph Rafferty

The Honorable Kelly Noonan Murphy, Co-Chairs

Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

DATE:

April 3, 2025

RE: LD 783, An Act to Continue Support for the Maine Multicultural Center

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Good afternoon Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and members of the committee—

My name is Aaliyah Merz. I'm a resident of Orono. I am here today as an Orono High School student on behalf of our Civil Rights Team. We are testifying in support of LD 783.

Under Maine's Attorney General and Department of Education, the Civil Rights Team is a student-based group working to create a safe and welcoming learning environment for students of all races, national origins, ancestries, genders, sexualities, religions, and abilities. Our work to protect students from all national origins and ancestries, specifically, is what brings us here today.

LD 783 will allocate money for the Maine Multicultural Center. In return, the money allocated will allow immigrant parents in our community to find employment using training they already have. In our school community, we have a good amount of families who are immigrants where parents have professional training from their home countries. For these families, having support to continue their careers in Maine could dramatically improve both their economic stability and their children's educational experience.

When people come here they shouldn't have to start from scratch or without a support system, but sadly, more often than not, that's what happens. The Maine Multi-Cultural Center provides resources for these immigrants that help them integrate into Maine society and provide things to help them get started and acclimate. These are things like: education—on the U.S. immigration system and language, support—to find accommodations and to help them feel at home, safe spaces—where families and individuals can connect, and, most importantly, training—so that they can enter the workforce. However, without proper funding for dedicated staff positions, the Center cannot effectively serve these skilled immigrants.

The MultiCultural Center's work directly supports our Civil Rights Team's goal of creating a welcoming environment for students of all national origins. In our school, we see firsthand how immigrant students can thrive when they and their families are supported. When people feel safe and welcomed, they become better students. If these students are simply placed in classrooms without guidance, they often struggle to find their place in the classroom and school.

When immigrant parents can find employment that matches their education and training, their children have more stability and better educational outcomes. This funding will help empower these families and enrich our entire community.

We urge the committee to vote in favor of LD 783. Thank you for considering our testimony.