

Testimony in Support of LD 1449

Resolve, Requiring the Commissioner of Administrative and Financial Services to Conduct a Study of the State's Grant, Contracting and Procurement Practices

Sponsor: Senator Tipping

April 15, 2025

Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury, and Honorable Members of the State and Local Government Committee,

My name is Hunter Cropsey and I am the Senior Programs and Community Engagement Manager for the Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition (MIRC). MIRC is a coalition of over 100 organizations forming a unique statewide network representing diverse ethnic communities with a mission to improve legal, social, and economic conditions for immigrants in the state of Maine. We write in support of LD 1449 Resolve, Requiring the Commissioner of Administrative and Financial Services to Conduct a Study of the State's Grant, Contracting and Procurement Practices.

As a program manager with MIRC, as well as the former Operations Director for the Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations, I have interacted with state procurement both as a project manager receiving state grants and as a procurement manager administering state grants. In both roles, I have supported small, racially diverse nonprofits and businesses through the challenges they face navigating state procurement, which are many and quite surmountable.

Common concerns I have personally heard while coaching from small nonprofits and businesses on state procurement include:

- Confusing Overall Process - State contracting processes—Request for Proposals (RFP's) and Request for Applications (RFA's)—are confusing, especially for those new to state procurement. Common areas of confusion include: unfamiliar words, frequent acronym use, similar information shared differently in multiple locations, and rigid budget templates.
- Hard to Find - State opportunities can be hard to find and interact with online.
- Time Intensive - The time and effort required to apply for grants can be disproportionate to the potential funding offered, which is often unclear.
- Unclear Timelines - The lack of clear timelines from application to decision complicates organizational budgetary planning.
- Few Lower Dollar Opportunities - Due to the high capacity requirement for administering state grants, there are few smaller dollar (\$10k-\$50k) funding opportunities, which could be impactful for smaller nonprofits.
- Blurred Purpose - The RFP process often mirrors the RFA process, with no practical distinction.
- Payment in Arrears - The requirement to front costs and wait months for reimbursement is a barrier for small entities with limited cash flow, and inherently gives preference to longstanding organizations. This is a particular challenge for small, immigrant-led nonprofits starting up.

Based on our experience and feedback we have received from small nonprofits and small businesses, we suggest exploring:

1. Developing a simplified grant (RFA) procedure that is distinct from other state contracting (RFP).
2. Allowing quarterly advance payment for low-risk grants,
3. A streamlined tiered approach for lower value service procurements and grants.
4. Developing plain-language guidance for those new to state procurement.

We are happy to assist the working group however we can to improve efficiency, transparency, equity, and accountability in the distribution and management of public funds.

Contact:

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