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**Testimony of Amy Titcomb**  
**In support of LD 1956**

Tuesday, May 13, 2025

Good morning Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Labor. My name is Amy Titcomb and I am the volunteer coordinator at Maine Association of New Americans (MANA). I am speaking today in support of LD 1956. I urge you to support this bill to provide ongoing funding for peer-to-peer workforce navigation. I've referred numerous community members to the pilot Peer Workforce Navigator Project, which is filling such an important gap for our clients and community.

MANA works to promote the social and personal empowerment of first- and second- generation immigrants in Maine. We see many program participants in need of guidance in the job hunt. This includes new arrivals with little English who are ready to work hard in a factory or service work setting, but need assistance finding their way to the right job and getting in-language assistance to apply. It also includes English-speaking professionals ready to put their experience to work for Maine, who need guidance in understanding the local landscape for their field and entry steps. It also includes immigrants who have been in Maine for several years building up work experience and English skills, who are now ready to shift from their first service sector job to a new career path or to entrepreneurship, but need guidance on where to begin. What they all have in common is anxious enthusiasm for joining the workforce, putting their skills and energy to use for our economy and our state where one in every 25 workers is an immigrant, and workers are badly needed across many sectors.

MANA's mentoring program matches community volunteer "mentors" with asylum-seeking families to assist with integration into the community. This often includes job-related steps like English practice, supporting the work permit application process, finding job-training opportunities, and searching and applying for the first job. Volunteers do not have expertise in these fields, rather they work alongside their mentee to identify and access appropriate resources. Many of our volunteers are retirees who have not themselves applied for jobs in many years: they are happy to drive their mentees to interviews and assist with printing resumes, but many do not feel equipped to help a New American assess what kinds of jobs are available, what they qualify for, and where to begin their search – this is where the Peer Workforce Navigators come in! Our mentoring program is now in its tenth year, and peer workforce navigators fill a gap that I remember well from our

earlier days. I remember a gulf with willing workers and helpful mentors on one side, and employers on the other – each trying to reach across and not quite making the connection.

One of my first experiences with the program was in support of an immigrant who I'll call E. She had been laid off from a local employer, and applied for and received Unemployment Insurance for several weeks before she found her next job. A full year later, long after E. was back working hard (ten-hour overnight shifts!) and paying taxes, it came to light that through an error, MDOL thought she had returned to work sooner than she had, and had flagged a few weeks of UI payments as fraudulent. In the meantime, E. had moved and never received communications explaining the process and offering appeal opportunities. By the time the situation was discovered, appeal deadlines had passed and E. was charged hefty fees for both the UI collected and burdensome fines on top of that – though there had been no fraud and her employer attested that she had not in fact worked during any of the time she received UI. This case was incredibly complicated, and the worker, her mentor, and our staff all felt overwhelmed and at a loss. I made several calls to MDOL who were understanding, but did not know how to direct us since the appeal deadline had passed. Fortunately, the Peer Workforce Navigator project had started up. They were able to work alongside E, checking in, advocating with the Department for them, and making sure they got their money returned. At weekly PWN clinics, E. was able to access interpreters and reassuring guidance from community members, as well as a qualified attorney who offered legal advice. It is a testament to the Maine government that MDOL is willing to invest in a program that acknowledges people like E. run into barriers that hurt them, and that MDOL really worked with the Navigators to make sure their mistake got fixed. The return of the funds not only righted an injustice, but built confidence in government for E - a person fairly new to the U.S. and to Maine's workforce, who came from a place where government programs are often assumed to be corrupt and predatory. Now, just a few years later, E and her family have purchased a home, been granted asylum, improved their English substantially, and continue to be productive workers, taxpayers and community members.

I have referred many others to the program for job searching. Just this week, I spoke to an immigrant gentleman after his meeting with a navigator. He has a service-sector job but now that he's improved his English, he'd like to put to use his experience as a science teacher in his home country. The navigator helped him identify steps to take, and find a local school with several open positions that seem like a great fit. I've also referred employers – when a friend who is a business owner heard I work with the immigrant community, he asked if I could help him recruit workers for his Maine business that struggles to find employees. My own network felt too small to find him the right match, but he was very grateful when I connected to PWN.

I have seen firsthand the value of the PWN project in helping connect our newest neighbors who are anxious to work to local employers anxious to hire. This program is a powerful investment in strengthening our future workforce. I urge you to vote **ought to pass** on LD 1956. I am happy to answer any questions.