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Portland, Maine

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LD 1259 and LD 1971

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee. My name is Javier Oliver, I am a resident of Portland. I am presenting testimony in support of LD 1259 and LD 1971. I support these bills for many reasons: they ensure our law enforcement resources go directly towards public safety, they avoid liability for following federal orders that might be illegal, and they protect all Maine citizens from ICE as it increasingly ignores legal protections and civil liberties guaranteed to all people by the Constitution. However, I will focus my testimony on the importance of growing Maine's immigrant communities and the positive effects these bills will have on growing said communities.

Maine needs to grow its immigrant communities to fill labor shortages, lower its high median age, and increase its diversity to appeal to a broader range of potential domestic migrants. Maine has the highest median age in the country. Our aging population needs a younger workforce to enter the healthcare field. Specifically, recent studies show that immigrants make up 4.5% of our nurses and 15.9% of physicians, surgeons, and podiatrists in Maine¹. If you walk through a Maine hospital or long-term care facility, you will notice a large share of the patient care (such as certified nurse assistants and medical assistants) and facilities staff are immigrants. These are vital workers caring for our aging population.

Personally, Maine's immigrant communities helped me feel more at home. When my wife, a physician at Maine Medical Center, was interviewing for jobs, our only concern about choosing Maine was its lack of diversity. We were moving from a very diverse area, and I was concerned about not feeling at home in a state where I would stand out. When we visited Portland, we saw a lot of people of color, despite the statistics we had read and this contributed to our decision to move here. This diversity is significantly boosted by immigrants. All this is to say that our international immigrant population attracts domestic immigration as well.

The recent escalation in detentions and deportations by DHS, along with their disregard for district court and Supreme Court orders, has chilled immigrant communities across the

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https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/the_growing_demand_for_healthcare_workers_in_maine.pdf

country. This manifests as increased school absenteeism², reluctance to seek necessary healthcare, and fear of going to work. While these bills will not prevent ICE from detaining immigrants in schools, religious buildings, and courthouses, they will send a strong message to immigrants that they are valued in Maine and will be safer than in most other states across the country.

Again, on a personal note, I would feel safer in Maine if these bills passed. While it may be unlikely, I do fear being mistakenly deported by ICE. DHS has stated it will seek to suspend habeas corpus and remains in open defiance of a Supreme Court order to return a man mistakenly deported to El Salvador despite a court order barring his removal to El Salvador. ICE is currently a threat to all US citizens, particularly citizens of color.

The numerous cities and states that have passed similar laws saw no increase in crime. There is no data backing claims that these bills would make Maine less safe. In fact, one study showed “that both property crime and violent crime decreased more in sanctuary counties than in nonsanctuary counties after 2014, when many such policies were implemented”³.

Congress is currently working to pass a reconciliation bill that includes adding roughly \$151.3 billion⁴ to DHS, including massive increases in detention spending and hiring of ICE officers. This funding erases any justification for requesting resources from Maine’s already strained law enforcement. The proposed increase in DHS funding, coupled with DHS’ recent extrajudicial actions highlights the urgency with which Maine needs to act to shield its immigrant communities.

I urge you to vote in favor of LD 1259 and LD 1971.

² <https://www.kff.org/racial-equity-and-health-policy/issue-brief/potential-impacts-of-increased-immigration-enforcement-on-school-attendance-and-funding>

³ <https://news.utexas.edu/2022/06/13/sanctuary-practices-lower-counties-crime-rates/>

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https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/rapid_analysis_house_reconciliation_bills_0525.pdf