

Testimony in Support of LD 1971

An Act to Protect Workers in This State by Clarifying the Relationship of State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies with Federal Immigration Authorities

Sponsor: Representative Dhalac

Public Hearing: Judiciary Committee 19th, May 2025 1:00 PM

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Ruben Torres, and I serve as the Advocacy, Communications, and Policy Manager for the Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition (MIRC). MIRC represents more than 100 organizations across Maine, including grassroots immigrant-led organizations, legal service providers, housing advocates, and direct service agencies, working collectively to improve the economic and social standing of Maine's immigrant communities, thereby uplifting the state as a whole. We are testifying in strong **support** of LD 1971 An Act to Protect Workers in This State by Clarifying the Relationship of State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies with Federal Immigration Authorities.

LD 1971 is about the appropriate role of state and local law enforcement agencies in society. It ensures that local resources are focused on local priorities and that trust between communities and law enforcement is preserved, and not undermined by blurred lines and inconsistent practices.

Maine's public safety relies on a simple principle: when people trust law enforcement, they engage with it. They report crimes, serve as witnesses, and call for help when something is wrong. We have seen, in both urban and rural areas, how quickly that trust deteriorates when local agencies are perceived to be acting as an extension of federal immigration enforcement.

LD 1971 codifies clear boundaries around immigration detainers, civil warrants, and hold requests; while still allowing law enforcement to take action in cases of serious criminal charges, open warrants, or threats to public safety. It ensures law enforcement understand their jurisdiction and just as importantly, it allows officers to focus on the work they are trained to do: protecting our communities, responding to emergencies, and preventing harm.

This legislation is also about Maine's economic resilience and social stability. When immigrant residents are pushed into the shadows, when they are unsure whether a 911 call could lead to detention, that has consequences far beyond the individual: it affects families, schools, workplaces, and our broader public health and safety infrastructure. Legislation like LD 1971 prevents the erosion of public trust that leads to underreporting of crime. It prevents the misallocation of law enforcement resources. And it prevents the kind of high-cost legal exposure that other jurisdictions have faced for detaining individuals unlawfully based on ICE detainers without judicial warrants.

Across our coalition, we regularly engage with both direct service providers and community leaders who ask the same question: *What happens when ICE arrives?* The reality is that civil immigration enforcement is a federal responsibility, and local agencies need clarity and consistency to avoid missteps. LD 1971 provides a uniform standard that protects both individuals and institutions.

This bill affirms that Maine's correctional facilities are not extensions of federal immigration detention. By requiring notice before interviews with ICE, and prohibiting decisions about

custody levels or access to programming based solely on immigration status, LD 1971 reflects basic due process.

Maine remains one of the safest states in the country. LD 1971 helps keep it that way by affirming clear lines of responsibility and reducing the confusion that has plagued other states.

We urge the Committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1971. This bill can be a solution to a legal and operational gray area. It's good policy, and most importantly, it helps ensure that all who live in Maine can participate in public life without fear.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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Endnotes

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