

Dear Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and honorable members of the Judiciary Committee.

My name is Kimberly Simmons, I live in Portland and I am support LD 1259 and LD 1971.

I have taught sociology and women and gender studies courses at USM for several decades, and I often have first or second generation immigrant students in my courses. Students come from different backgrounds - there are so many different pathways of immigration - and the diversity of national origins, religious identities, and family stories shape our classroom conversations. Students who identify as refugees explain the realities of leaving a homeland against their wishes, in search of more safety. Students who experienced war first-hand share insights about how global militaries shape everyday life for civilians. Students who lived through famine and drought connect climate change and mass migration, pressures we all may experience in larger or smaller ways. Students who came to Maine for educational opportunities share the ways they appreciate USM and also some of their surprises and disappointments, helping us all recognize that there are many ways to organize ourselves and our institutions and we all can learn from exposure to alternatives. This is all to say, the inclusion of students from a diversity of backgrounds has made teaching and learning at USM endlessly more interesting, rewarding and enriched. Research indicates that immigrant students currently comprise about 6% of the student population, with most students planning to reside in the USA as long as possible. (https://digitalcommons.usm.maine.edu/usm_gtn/2/). We wish to grow our undergraduate population, and there are many ways we could make USM more inclusive and attractive to even more immigrant and international students going forward.

However fear - fear of ICE, of racial profiling and racial violence, of discrimination in our classrooms and institution, of the police, and of detention and deportation, as well as the long list of fears associated with poverty, xenophobia and racism in the USA - is antithetical to a good educational environment. We simply cannot teach and learn with this much threat and fear in our midst.

I am not prepared to have ICE or the local police enter my classroom. I am not prepared to have a valued student detained, without due process. I am not prepared for unmarked men with masks to simply remove someone from my campus. I am not prepared to be threatened because I will ask questions of these individuals. I am not prepared to be denied my own civil rights nor am I prepared to witness the denial of others. I am not prepared for Maine to allow the trampling of basic human rights of our students, while I am teaching them about these concepts.

We need to establish safety within our communities. We need people to be safe to access the basic institutions that allow opportunity without fear of capricious retribution. We need to stop every overreach by law enforcement that confuses a legal process with the right to illegally detain us. This requires even more transparent and steadfast adherence to a legal process that is fair and that we can all reference.

It is true that Maine is under attack from the Federal Government. It is true that we will continue to draw the ire of a Federal Government intent on terrorizing people based on targeting identities deemed "other" and creating dehumanizing language and programs that justify the suspension of civil rights for some (and then perhaps all). We need to find ways to stand up to these pressures that do not require us to capitulate morally or practically. Our University system is BETTER because of our immigrant students, and they go on to do fabulous work in our communities, growing us into a more skilled and capable and resilient society. We need our diversity of thought, background, information, practices, and interests to build a future and none of us can do it alone. We literally need all of us. Please do not allow our educational spaces to become resegregated through threat and fear. We need to pass LD 1259 and LD 1971 as well as many of the other bills that will strengthen Maine as a true home for future generations.

Sincerely,

Kimberly Simmons, PhD

Portland