

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of Maine State Bill LD 2106. I regret that I cannot be there in person, and I appreciate you reading this written testimony.

I am a professor of education at Bates College; however, I speak based upon my own professional experience and not on behalf of the institution or its programs.

I joined Bates's faculty in 2011, attracted to its long close relationship with its surrounding city, Lewiston. All of our Bates education classes have a community-engaged component, where Bates students serve as classroom aides, one-on-one tutors, and mentors in local classrooms and afterschool programs. I also teach in our Teacher Education program, which prepares Bates students for teaching licensure, often through teaching practica in local classrooms. I frequently invite local school administrators, parents, and education organizers into my classroom to speak to my students. I also partner with local nonprofit staff to provide data and support programming.

Through this work, I have witnessed the many strengths of the Lewiston schools. Teachers and administrators often go to extraordinary lengths to welcome immigrant students into the school community, understand students' needs and strengths, and provide programming that supports their growth. This is difficult, but rewarding work, and, for many immigrant youth, the schools are a place of refuge.

And this is what schools are meant to be. Over and over, research has shown that students learn best when they feel safe, emotionally and physically, in school. Safety allows a student to take risks, be challenged, and open themselves to learning. This safety is even more critical when a student is acquiring a new language, in an unfamiliar culture, and, sometimes, coming with the trauma of living through war, famine, and transcontinental migration.

Over the years, I have also been very fortunate to have a number of Lewiston and Auburn students as Bates students, most of whom are immigrants or the children of immigrants. These students are, without exception, extraordinary. One, whose parents emigrated from Somalia, is now a doctor working in Portland. Another is a teacher. A third is currently a biochemistry major, hoping to go into health-related public policy. All of these students cite strong, caring schools as a major reason for their educational and professional success.

ICE is casting a long shadow over local schools right now. Students are scared. Parents are terrified. Many families are making the hard—but understandable—decision to keep their children home. How awful that they must choose between two of the very reasons they chose to make Lewiston their home: academic opportunity and safety.

School staff are also feeling the anxiety and uncertainty of not knowing if and when their schools will become sites of immigration raids. This additional pressure on teachers will likely only fuel the teacher shortage crisis, which Maine is feeling acutely.

LD 2106 is a commonsense measure to restore a measure of peace to our public institutions. The bill does not obstruct federal officials from doing their work. Instead, it protects schools and other public institutions from immigration enforcement without warrant. This transparency and clarity would likely give many families the peace of mind they need to send their children to school, and it would provide teachers and administrators clarity around the federal enforcement in their places of work.

All Mainers, no matter where they or their parents were born, deserve safety as they live, work, and learn. Please pass LD 2106.

Mara Tieken
New Gloucester
LD 2106

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