



April 12, 2019

**Testimony of Julia Brown, Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project
In Support of LD 1317**

Good afternoon, Senator Gratwick, Representative Hymanson, and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of LD 1317.

My name is Julia Brown. I am the Advocacy and Outreach Attorney at the Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project (ILAP). ILAP is Maine's only statewide nonprofit provider of immigration law and related legal aid to Maine's low-income residents. On behalf of ILAP and our clients, I ask the Committee to support LD 1317, otherwise known as "An Act To Restore Services To Help Certain Noncitizens Meet Their Basic Needs."

In 1996, the United States Congress eliminated access to federal safety net benefits for most immigrants as a part of so-called "welfare reform." Maine's response to this punitive federal change was to immediately step in and cover at the state level those noncitizens who had been cut off from federal programs. It was not until 2011 that Governor LePage's budget ended state coverage for most noncitizens, and today is your opportunity to right that wrong.

It is imperative that Maine once again include noncitizens in its public assistance programs. Noncitizens come to Maine and participate in the full range of Maine life, including paying taxes, and should be treated like other Mainers. Moreover, noncitizen adults often have U.S. citizen children who would benefit from their parents receiving services. Denying noncitizens and their citizen or noncitizen children these vital programs is to abandon them for no reason other than their immigration status.

Currently, families fleeing persecution and seeking asylum, green card holders who have held their green cards for less than five years, and some survivors of serious crimes, among others, are ineligible for life-saving benefits. While asylum seekers desperately want to work, they cannot legally work until sometimes a year and a half after arriving to this country, but are expected to somehow survive without services. Or think about a permanent resident who has had his green card and has been working and paying taxes for four years. If he were suddenly injured and temporarily disabled, he could not avail himself of life-saving benefits that he otherwise could have if his injury instead had occurred *five* years after obtaining a green card.

Please remember the purpose of our safety net. Programs like MaineCare and food assistance help families in need get on their feet. Once immigrant families have obtained economic security, they are able to work, buy homes, start businesses, and otherwise help Maine's economy grow. By denying these families basic services, Maine is losing out on enormous potential.

Maine needs immigrants. We need immigrants because Maine has an aging population and a dwindling workforce. We need immigrants because Maine benefits from diverse perspectives and skills. But most of all, we need immigrants because our friends, community members, local business owners, and neighbors are immigrants. Maine must extend the same goodwill toward our immigrant neighbors as we do to our nonimmigrant ones. We are all in this together. ILAP implores you to restore these services to our noncitizen community members.