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**THE MAINE SENATE**  
131st Legislature

**Testimony of Senator Richard A. Bennett**

In Support of LD 1050,

"Resolve, Directing the Department of Labor to Request a Federal Waiver to Allow Presumptive Work Eligibility for Asylum Seekers"

21 March 2023

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and all esteemed members of the Labor and Housing Committee, thank you for allowing me to voice my support for L.D. 1050, "Resolve, Directing the Department of Labor to Request a Federal Waiver to Allow Presumptive Work Eligibility for Asylum Seekers," of which I am a co-sponsor. I am Senator Rick Bennett, and I have the honor of serving 14 communities in Western Maine in the State Senate.

At a time when people of prime working age are flowing into our state at unprecedented levels, Maine is facing an increasingly severe worker shortage. This is because recently-arrived asylum seekers must go through a waiting period of six months before they can receive a worker's permit under federal law. This forces them to rely on public and non-profit assistance, creating an outsized burden on our social safety nets and an unnecessary reduction of our potential workforce. Many Maine businesses are currently struggling to find work under these conditions, but it doesn't have to be this way.

Newcomers arriving into our state immigrate to this country fleeing from persecution and violence, and in search of work and means to provide for their families. As a rule, we should always be trying to help those trying to put food on the table for their folks, and we should always look out for the businesses run by our constituents here in Maine, in this case helping them with their labor shortages.

Therefore, I recommend the committee pass this legislation to direct the Maine Department of Labor to request a federal waiver granting asylum seeker awaiting work permits presumptive eligibility.