

Testimony of the Greater Portland Council of Governments

In Support of

LD 1050, *Resolve, Directing the Department of Labor to Request a Federal Waiver to Allow Presumptive Work Eligibility for Asylum Seekers*

March 21, 2023

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and Members of the Labor & Housing Committee my name is Kathryn Violette.

I am Community Engagement Coordinator for the Greater Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG) and I am here today to speak on behalf of GPCOG in support of LD 1050, *Resolve, Directing the Department of Labor to Request a Federal Waiver to Allow Presumptive Work Eligibility for Asylum Seekers*.

GPCOG serves 25 municipal members in Cumberland County, from Sebago Lake to Casco Bay, as well as Saco, Biddeford, Arundel, and Old Orchard Beach through the Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System (PACTS). We deliver transportation, land use, sustainability, and economic development services to our members and their communities.

In recent years our member municipalities have asked GPCOG to help with the arrival of asylum seekers in need of shelter and services.

Since 2019, when the Portland Expo was filled with people arriving in our region, we have supported our municipal members, especially Portland and South Portland, as they provided extraordinary support to asylum seekers along with the rest of the region's unhoused people.

Our entire region is impacted today by the continuing arrival of people in need. Municipal resources have been stretched to the breaking point, and beyond.

Our members need help.

One important way to help involves allowing asylum seekers to work – something they are anxious to do to support themselves and their families.

We are grateful that Senator Collins, Senator King, and Representative Pingree have sponsored or cosponsored bills in Congress to change federal law to allow asylum seekers to work sooner than existing law permits.

We believe LD 1050 offers another effective path toward allowing asylum seekers to go to work as soon as possible.

The waiver request proposed in LD 1050 will help asylum seekers and ease the burden of supporting people who are not allowed to support themselves.

For these reasons we urge you to support passage of LD 1050. Thank you.