

Testimony from the Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition regarding:
**LD 1169: An Act to Amend the Laws Governing the Foreign Credentialing and Skills Recognition
Revolving Loan Program**

Sponsored By: Representative Kristen Cloutier
Public Hearing: Tuesday, April 4, 2023 at 1:30pm

Dear Members of the Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement, and Business:

My name is Tobin Williamson and I am the Advocacy Manager with the Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition (MIRC), a statewide network of almost 100 member organizations working to enhance the lives of Maine's immigrant communities. MIRC works to advance systemic changes in Maine through collaborative advocacy to ensure that voices of the state's large, diverse, and growing immigrant communities are heard.

On a personal note, I live in the city of Lewiston in Androscoggin County and I am quite pleased to see much of Lewiston's delegation represented as a sponsor or co-sponsor of this legislation; my thanks to Representative Cloutier, Senator Rotundo, Representative Abdi, and Representative Lajoie.

One hallmark of the current Foreign Credentialing and Skills Recognition Revolving Loan program is its design for people who are prohibited from working due to federal immigration laws. We are grateful that Congresswoman Pingree, Senator King, and Senator Collins are longstanding national champions in a bipartisan effort to reduce work authorization times for asylum seekers, but changing federal immigration policy is an extremely slow process. Maine's impacted communities need relief now.

Unfortunately, many individuals in the target population eligible for this program are not in a position to take out a new loan; how can they be expected to go into debt when they have no way of knowing when they will be able to legally work and have an income? Instead of a loan, then, what has been proposed by Rep. Cloutier and the cosponsors is that a grant would be much more effective in helping them achieve what they need to move forward in integrating into Maine's society and workforce. This could be driver's education course, application fees, English language access and testing, foreign education and credential translations, and so on.

With a maximum expenditure of \$1,000 per grant, we feel this would be a small but impactful investment into Maine's future workforce. Therefore, we highly encourage the passage of LD 1169: An Act to Amend the Laws Governing the Foreign Credentialing and Skills Recognition Revolving Loan Program as an investment in Mainers and the Maine economy. Thank you for your consideration of this important and urgent matter.

Tobin Williamson
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MIRC Advocacy Manager

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