

**TESTIMONY OF MAINE IMMIGRANTS' RIGHTS COALITION
SUPPORTING L.D. 1702:**

**Resolve, to Establish the Commission to Improve the Educational Experience of People
Who Are Resettling in Maine**

Public Hearing: Tuesday, May 09, 2023, at 1:00 PM

Sponsor: **Speaker Talbot Ross of Portland**

Link:

<http://www.mainelegislature.org/legis/bills/getPDF.asp?paper=HP1091&item=1&snum=131>

Chair Rafferty, Chair Brennan, and Members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

My name is Ruben Torres, representing the Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition (MIRC), a coalition of almost 100 organizations dedicated to advancing and defending the rights of Maine's immigrant communities. Our mission is to improve the legal, social, and economic conditions experienced by immigrants, benefiting the state as a whole.

Today, I am here to testify in support of L.D. 1702, which establishes the Commission to Improve the Educational Experience of People Who Are Resettling in Maine.

Maine has seen a significant increase in asylum seekers, refugees, and immigrants in recent years, bringing diversity and enriching our communities. The last census showed us that the percentage of children of color by county in the state of Maine varies from 9% to 25%. However, this diversity also presents unique challenges when it comes to the educational integration of these individuals and their children. Language barriers, in particular, hinder their resettlement and integration process, impacting their access to and success in public education programs.

Cultural adjustments further affect the educational experience of students from resettled backgrounds. Studies have shown that a considerable percentage of asylum seekers, refugees, and immigrants experience a sense of cultural dissonance in their schools, negatively affecting their academic performance and overall well-being.

The American Immigration Council conducted a national questionnaire that measured whether people feel like they belong in their local community. The results showed that 74% of respondents didn't feel like they belonged. Unfortunately, we don't have to look any further than the current events regarding asylum seekers around our state to see examples of what that sentiment looks like in our own backyards.

What makes L.D. 1702 particularly commendable is its inclusive nature, mandating input from the affected communities themselves. This approach promotes transparency and active engagement, ensuring that recommendations are rooted in the lived experiences and needs of the individuals and communities it aims to support.

Investing in this commission is an investment in the future of our state and in the success of individuals who contribute to our communities. Supporting L.D. 1702 affirms our commitment to inclusive, high-quality education for all, regardless of background or immigration status. With the commission's establishment, we can profoundly impact the lives of countless individuals and foster a stronger, more vibrant Maine.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter and for your dedication to improving educational opportunities for all residents of Maine. Your support of L.D. 1702 will transform lives and help shape a more inclusive and prosperous future for our state.