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SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE

*Testimony of Speaker Rachel Talbot Ross supporting*  
**LD 2167 - An Act to Develop Maine's Economy and Strengthen Its  
Workforce by Establishing an Office of New Americans**  
*Before the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government*

Good morning Senator Nangle, Representative Stover and esteemed members of the Committee on State and Local Government. I am Representative Rachel Talbot Ross of Portland. I represent House District 118, which is the Portland peninsula, and I have the distinct honor of serving as the Speaker of the House. I stand before you today in strong support of LD 2167, *An Act to Develop Maine's Economy and Strengthen Its Workforce by Establishing an Office of New Americans*.

To begin, I must thank my colleague, my friend and the bill's sponsor Rep. Deqa Dhalac. She has been a relentless advocate for making sure new immigrants to Maine have the support they need to become fully engaged and self-sufficient members of our communities. Quite honestly, Maine is a better place because of her efforts.

The establishment of an Office of New Americans (ONA) reflects Maine's commitment to inclusivity and acknowledges the significant contributions immigrants bring to our communities. Resilient, talented and hardworking folks from across the world are making Maine their new home and we all stand to benefit. By cultivating a welcoming environment and offering essential resources, this office will be instrumental in meeting this pivotal moment for our state.

You will hear from countless proponents from across the political and geographic spectrum today. I have deep respect for all of these organizations and I'm grateful for their support. Much of this testimony will focus on the immense economic potential that is to be unlocked by making sure that new Americans are fully engaged and participating in our workforce. I am in complete agreement with that assessment, but instead of reiterating that shared value, I want to share an equally vital reason for supporting this legislation.

And that is that immigration is core to who we are as Mainers and is the true history of this state. While the Office of New Americans may be new, for 400 years immigrants

have helped to mold the economic, cultural, and social character of Maine. French and Irish immigrants who arrived in the post-Civil War years of industrial expansion contributed to the development of industries in Portland, Lewiston, Auburn, and Biddeford. At the turn of the 20th century, Armenians, Albanians, Chinese, and Italians followed. More recently, we have become home to families from the Democratic Republic of Congo, Syria, Somalia, Sudan and Jordan.

Not everyone came here of their own accord. From the earliest European settlement in the region, enslaved people were forcibly brought to Maine to work and live. This, too, is part of the cultural tapestry that brings us here today and deserves mention.

And while folks have arrived speaking different languages and practicing different religions, the common thread is the hope and the promise of opportunity. Of a better life. Of safety and security. On that promise, we have and we must continue to deliver.

As a 9th generation Mainer, my family has been fortunate enough to benefit from the diversity, resilience, and immeasurable talents immigrants have brought to our state. Overcoming adversity, immigrants and their descendants have become integral members of our society, shaping Maine into the place we are so lucky to call home and a place known for its warmth, hospitality, and acceptance.

With the establishment of an ONA, Maine will become the 19th state in the country to join the Office of New Americans State Network, a consortium of U.S. states with dedicated offices or staff for coordinating immigrant integration. The Network is coordinated by a partnership of two organizations, World Education Services and the American Immigration Council.

Through the Network, the State will access expertise, experiences, and best practices from states across the country on developing policy approaches to support the successful economic, social, and civic integration of immigrants.

Ultimately, the Office of New Americans is not just the practical next step or another bureaucratic endeavor - it is a testament to our commitment to the principles of inclusivity, diversity, and shared prosperity that have built this state.

Thank you for your attention to this matter, and I urge your support on this legislation. Thank you for your time and commitment to a diverse and thriving Maine.