



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Testimony of Representative Margaret Craven in support of
LD 2167, An Act to Develop Maine's Economy and Strengthen Its Workforce
by Establishing an Office of New Americans
Before the State and Local Government Committee

Good afternoon, Sen. Baldacci, Rep. Stover and honorable members of the State and Local Government Committee. My name is Margaret Craven, and I serve House District 93, which is part of Lewiston. I am here today to speak in favor of **LD 2167, An Act to Develop Maine's Economy and Strengthen Its Workforce by Establishing an Office of New Americans**.

I am delighted to support this policy because I know it will make a difference in increasing our labor force and relieving the strain on our healthcare providers, manufacturers and workers in every sector across the state.

I have gotten several calls and emails from constituents with concerns regarding the cost of this bill, worried that our dollars will not be spent wisely. That is why I will be presenting you a different story today than you will hear from others.

I, myself, was an immigrant at one point, but then once an immigrant, always an immigrant, I suppose. When I was 17 years old, I left my home in Ireland. I had grown up in a very rural part of County Galway where there were no opportunities for higher education or work during the sixties, so there was massive immigration from Ireland to the US, Canada and the UK at the time. I arrived in the U.S. with an eighth-grade education and no work skills to speak of. Still, I had many advantages that our new Americans today do not have. I had a Green Card, I was English speaking and I was European, which made it easier to integrate. Still, I struggled.

I needed a high school diploma and working skills. I needed help applying for a Social Security card, learning how to use American money, learning the name of food items; I had never heard of a BLT or an English muffin. I know today that it's hard to believe that somebody from Ireland wouldn't know all about American culture, but there was no internet, no social media, and if there had been, I wouldn't have been able to afford it.

I landed in the middle of Boston where there was a settled Irish community that helped me, and through trial and error, I was able to survive. I consider myself a person who has achieved the American Dream. I met and married a Mainer and settled in Lewiston. I went to Lewiston High

School and tested out with a GED. Then I attended USM, earning an undergraduate degree and then a Masters. I got my education while working 30 hours a week and raising my family.

I have worked all my life since I arrived in this country, and I have paid taxes. I am not boasting about myself; immigrants do this every day. I just want this committee to know this bill is worth the investment.

Immigrants, as is well-documented, start 55% of all start-up businesses in the US, and the children of immigrants start 64% of all new businesses. The return on investment in new Americans is worth it!

From personal experience in the Lewiston-Auburn area, our new Americans work in our nursing homes, our group homes, in our schools, our childcare centers, and our YM and YWCA's- they are entering the workforce and securing jobs in industries that desperately need more staff. They have opened businesses and they pay taxes. They buy homes, buy cars and spend their money locally.

Supporting our new Americans is the investment, so I urge you to please vote in favor of LD 2167!