



Maine Community College System

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT

323 State Street, Augusta, ME 04330-7131
(207) 629-4000 | Fax (207) 629-4048 | mccs.me.edu

TO: Senator Tim Nangle, Representative Holly Stover
Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government

FROM: Julia Trujillo Luengo, Director Strategic Planning Management
Email: jtrujillo@mccs.me.edu

RE: Testimony in Support of LD 2167, *An Act to Develop Maine's Economy and Strengthen Its Workforce by Establishing an Office of New Americans*

DATE: January 30, 2024

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover and members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government, my name is Julia Trujillo Luengo, and I am pleased to be here today to offer the Maine Community College System's support for LD 2167 and to take a moment to thank Representative Dhalac for sponsoring this important legislation. I have recently joined the staff at MCCS after leading the implementation of the State's Ten-Year Economic Development Plan, which aims to achieve three overarching goals, one of them adding 75,000 people to Maine's talent pool by 2029.

I have dedicated most of my public service career to the advancement of Maine's racial, ethnic and linguistic minorities in a wide variety of roles, including: transforming Maine's Migrant Education program at the Maine Department of Education; leading Maine's Department of Health and Human Services Office of Multicultural Affairs, which among many responsibilities was the U.S. Office of Refugee Resettlement designee to oversee all federally funded services to support the long term integration of Maine's refugees; and most recently, in 2017, I built Maine's first municipal office solely dedicated to support the economic opportunity of the City of Portland's racial, ethnic and linguistic minorities. In that role, we pioneered the first measurable municipal strategic action plan for inclusion in the country, which led to several nationally recognized best practices.

Maine's community colleges provide an accessible, high-quality, and affordable education to Mainers of all ages, including immigrants and refugees, and prepare them for a wide range of critical jobs in our economy. We work with high school students in our early college programs who are seeking a jump start to their college or career pathway. We teach young adults in our traditional academic programs, many who benefit from Maine's Free College initiative, and we train unemployed, underemployed, or working Maine adults of all ages who want to switch or optimize their career goals.

The immigrant journey is one of loss. Like me, many others have left behind what is dearest to most of us: our mom and dads, our siblings, our children, our homes, our careers and professional identities, our culture, traditions and rituals, this journey is also one of new beginnings. Our state has been the destination for many before us with hope guiding this often-difficult journey; a goal to integrate and contribute to our new home and optimize our maximum potential.

Maine's immigrants and refugees are an opportunity to our State—those who have been here for years or decades and those who have recently arrived. Our drive to reach success is a winning formula to support the growth of our economy and the rapid and concerning decline of our overall working-age population. This is why MCCA sees the Office of New Americans as critical to our efforts. Their mission, to “undertake and promote activities that improve the economic and civic integration of immigrants into the State’s workforce and communities,” is one we see as critical to Maine’s economic future. MCCA colleges have already been championing many efforts in support of this commitment, including:

Hiring New Mainer workforce navigators at Northern Maine Community College and at our statewide workforce training center, the Harold Alfond Center for the Advancement of Maine’s Workforce. At Central Maine and Southern Maine Community Colleges, we opened language learning centers; and York County Community College is collaborating with Sanford Adult Education in three specific areas: Manufacturing Technician, Welding and Healthcare.

MCCA remains and will continue its commitment to be a vital contributing partner to deliver on this hope and maximize the prior skills and education of the many immigrants and refugees that now call Maine home.

We urge your support of L.D. 2167 to provide the critical structure Maine needs to support the future of our State, our industries, our communities, and our people.

Thank you.