



# **AGC MAINE**

THE CONSTRUCTION ASSOCIATION

**Testimony of Matt Marks in Support of LD 2167  
An Act to Develop Maine's Economy and Strengthen Its Workforce  
by Establishing an Office of New Americans  
January 30, 2024**

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government, my name is Matt Marks, I am Principal and Cornerstone Government Affairs and here on behalf of my client AGC Maine.

AGC Maine supports LD 2167 which creates an Office of New Americans. Data in 2020 revealed that ~25% of construction workers in the United States were immigrants, and during the debate on Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA), it was shared that an estimated 80,000 DACA recipients are working in construction in the United States. In Maine, the recent arrival of New Americans has created both opportunities and challenges. Despite archaic and dysfunctional Federal policies, Maine has forged ahead to coordinate connection between employers and potential employees.

For perspective, and to explain AGC Maine's support for the bill, it's easiest to share experiences with the recent communities to immigrate to our state. For several years AGC Maine has been an active member of the Maine Business Immigration Coalition, known as MEBIC, now part of the American Business Immigration Association. When New Americans arrived the AGC Maine team quickly reached out to MEBIC and local leaders to understand how the construction industry could connect with potential workers. Of course, we knew because of Federal law it would be quite a bit of time before any potential worker, qualified or not, could apply their skills in our industry.

We quickly learned that the process of identifying potential employees would be difficult. Multiple agencies assembled to deal with pressing issues. Fortunately, we were able to determine that at least some people who arrived had construction skills. Fast forward to this year, many of those who arrived years ago have become or will shortly become eligible for work. AGC Maine's Executive Director, Kelly Flagg, designed a program that offers these individuals several required certifications for construction, and an introduction to Maine's construction industry. This program also includes construction specific English to assist in the transition to work. The first cohort of this program has 18 participants, who have met with one employer and will be meeting with several more over the next few weeks. These employers are excited to help in the transition from this registered pre-apprenticeship to a formal apprenticeship program based on each individual's skills and desired work.

AGC Maine recognized that the process could be improved, and having streamlined communication between agencies, employers, and New Americans will provide direct benefit to Maine's economy and the transition to much-needed more working families.

The Office of New Americans demonstrates action from the Administration to formally bring together resources. While the median age in Maine, 45.1, is the oldest in the country, and our state's prime working-age population (aged 20-64) is projected to decrease by 5.3% by 2030, Maine's median age for construction workers is 47. The aging population poses a major barrier to meeting future needs and AGC America identified immigration reform as a priority in their 2019 Workforce Development Plan<sup>1</sup>.

Building a workforce is not simple, AGC Maine has programs that train incumbent workers with new skills, and a specific course for high school students known as the construction immersion program, but we also know recruiting foreign-born skilled workers must be part of the effort. There simply aren't enough candidates in our current population to meet the needs.

In Maine, we have a history of foreign-born workers moving here and creating generations of skilled workers in their communities. We recognize that some might resist this effort, citing Federal policies at the border or other immigration policies, but it's clear to us that the New American Office is essential for addressing the continued strain of meeting workforce demands and we encourage the Committee to pass this bill. I want to thank the members of the Committee for hearing our view and welcome any questions.

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<sup>1</sup> AGC America's Workforce Development Plan:  
[https://www.agc.org/sites/default/files/Files/Communications/Workforce\\_Development\\_Plan\\_2.0\\_2019.pdf](https://www.agc.org/sites/default/files/Files/Communications/Workforce_Development_Plan_2.0_2019.pdf)  
188 Whitten Road, Augusta ME 04330 [www.agcmaine.org](http://www.agcmaine.org)