

Good afternoon, Senator Nangle and Representative Stover and honorable members of the State and Local Government Committee. I am here today to testify in support of LD2167, and the establishment of an Office of New Americans in Maine. My name is Michelle Lamm, I am the executive director of Greater Portland Family Promise. Through this role I have had the opportunity to work with many New Mainers.

One of the Main objectives of the Office of New Mainers is to build workforce pathways and entrepreneurship supports for immigrants. Many of the New Americans in our program have a strong desire to learn, and to work. However, there is a lack of workplace development opportunities available to them. New Americans should be able to thrive, to use all their gifts and talents to contribute to Maines economy and we greatly in need of a state driven coordinated entry system to provide all new arrivals with an intake to connect people with English classes, workforce development, child-care, internet access, transportation, and employment opportunities. 60% of our staff at Family Promise are New Mainers. I am proud to work alongside the individuals and glad that Family Promise is contributing to future opportunities for advancement.

Leonel has 13-years of experience in the Quality Management System sector in Angola and Portugal. While waiting for his work authorization Leonel completed a welding certificate program through Fedcap. He believes that this will open opportunities for himself and others to get jobs at companies such as Casco Bay Steel and Cianbro. He says that he learned that companies like this offer training programs, and you must dedicate time and pass their test to become certified to work there but they pay well.

Isequiél has his bachelor's in accounting and in Geophysics and has 15 years working in the oil industry. Isequiél completed two certificate programs through Fedcap, one certificate in manufacturing from the Manufacturer's Association of Maine (MAME) and the other from the American Society of Mechanical Engineers (ASME). He graduated top of his class. However, in his manufacturing job interviews they described him as overqualified for the job. Isequiél then found a position working as a housing navigator with Prosperity Maine

Carmen is from Equatorial Guinea and has been living in the U.S for 9 years. Until coming to Maine in 2021 she never had the opportunity to study for a career. She found Maine to be a very welcoming city for new Mainers. She joined the workforce development program medical assistant program through PAE and that was the best decision I've made. I'm so grateful to the workforce program, because of them I'm a graduate Certified Medical Assistant and currently working, my goal is to become nurse. Carmen then completed a paid Medical Assistant Apprenticeship program with Northern Light and was hired immediately.

Clarice, also from Angola holds a bachelor's degree in finance and an MBA and crossed 3 countries: Angola, Brasil and Portugal before coming here to Maine. She has more than 13 years' experience in the finance field. Completing the Teller training program offered by Portland Adult Education helped her to understand all the bank and finance systems. At the same time she began working with Goodwill Workforce Solutions who helped her with her resume and cover letter, proper clothes to attend the training and meetings and support with childcare. Finally, she participated in Leadership Portland, a civic program about Portland that explores the complexities of the city's industries and pressing issues. This program is essential for those who are looking a deep dive into the opportunities and challenges of community evolution coming together, hearing from experts, and intersecting around the issues in a highly immersive learning model. This program allows me to know about the challenges facing in my community, make good connections with local leaders and find a pathway to start my career here in U.S. as Grant Accountant at Portland Public Schools.

Sandrine arrived in Portland in July 2022. Sandrine has a bachelor's in management and a master's in computer science. For 14 years Sandrine worked as the head of human resources and finance for the Ministry of Civil Service in Gabon. When she first arrived Sandrine immediately began taking English

classes and then participated in Fedcap's Families Forward workforce development program Sandrine. Fedcap placed Sandrine with Family Promise as a volunteer and helped with childcare for her 4-year-old son. Within 6 months she was offered a job as a case manager with us,

Johnson, originally from Nigeria also arrived in Maine about 2 years ago. Johnson is a self-taught electrician and general contractor. He is currently participating in a construction and electrician training through the Maine construction association. Johnson loves this training because of the knowledge that he is acquiring in the construction field. He hopes this will lead to a paid apprenticeship and for him to become a fully certified engineer or electrician and to remain working here in Maine.

Luis grew up in Angola he graduated with a bachelor's in economics. Luis is an entrepreneur and owned his own business in Angola and managed his own operations and inventory. Luis very quickly learned to speak English through English classes and immersing himself into the community. While living at Hope House in Portland he volunteered to help other asylum seekers. After receiving his work permit Luis was hired as Shelter Supervisor for Family Promise. Luis quickly excelled and impressed our who team with his skills and was promoted to Case Manager, where he hopes to continue and to be able to contribute to the integration of the new Mainers into our community.

Juliana also from Angola says that when it came time to choose an area to study it was either medicine or engineering. She is working hard on improving her the English language proficiency. She hopes to one day secure a job as an Environmental Engineer and contribute in a positive way. To her it's important to live a health life style economically and socially while at the same time taking good care of ourselves, the environment and future generations.

Difference between these folks is all have or had a higher level of English and/or vehicles to help with transportation. For the other families that we work with there are many barriers and challenges. Jimmy was a mathematics professor in Angola but is struggling to transfer his qualifications, he took at job as a custodian at Portland Public Schools hoping to get his foot in the door.

Esther, a mother of two who is traveling two hours each day from Brunswick to Portland to access the HiSET program, the high School equivalency classes at Portland Adult Education. She wants to one day become a Certified Nursing Assistant.

Odete and Trisha have a background in doing hair but don't have any formal training and would benefit from a Cosmetology program.

Marianna, 3 children and two 2-year-old twins. She has her high school diploma and a background in customer service and working as a lab assistant. Like many others Marianna recently received her work permit but has not been successful in finding a job because of her limited English proficiency and lack of access to childcare and transportation. Her long-term goal is also to become a CAN and to work in a hospital.

The Office of New Americans can be instrumental in creating these opportunities like this across the State of Maine and offering more English Language classes both in person and online, transportation and childcare. The Office of New Americans can create more pathways for New Americans to contribute to our communities.

Sincerely,



Michelle Lamm, Executive Director  
Greater Portland Family Promise