

TO:

The Honorable Joseph Rafferty

The Honorable Kelly Noonan Murphy, Co-Chairs

Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and  
Cultural Affairs

DATE: April 3, 2025

RE: LD 783, An Act to Continue Support for the Maine Multicultural  
Center

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Good afternoon Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and members of the committee. My name is Pamela Proulx-Curry, I reside in Old Town, Maine, and I am the Executive Director of the Maine MultiCultural Center (MMCC). I came before the Education a couple of years ago when the Maine MultiCultural Center when Bangor had just been designated as a refugee relocation center and the Center was just transitioning from an all-volunteer organization to a professionally staffed one in order to gear up for what we believed would be an increase in immigrants resettling in the greater Bangor area. The Maine MultiCultural Center was founded, in part, to address an increasing labor shortage in our region. The State of

Maine's own Department of Labor predicted a shortage of 90,000 workers over a decade as older Mainers began to retire and leave the workforce. Even if all the people born in Maine stayed in Maine, and went to work in Maine, there still would not be enough new workers to replace all the retirees. It was clear that we needed people to migrate to Maine if our economy was to continue to thrive.

Welcoming refugees and other immigrants to the community who were searching for a place to live and work, seemed like a natural solution to our problem. Indeed, immigrants have turned around what had been a years long trend of declining population. Last year Maine's population grew by, thanks to immigrants.

Further, research shows that immigrants have a net positive economic impact on the communities in which they settle.

According to the New American Economy and the American Immigration Council, the 56,300 immigrants in Maine made up 4.0% of the population, and 4.5% of the workforce. They collectively had a household income of \$2.2 Billion, paid \$625.8 Million in taxes including \$248.9 Million to Social Security and \$69.1 Million to Medicare, leaving them with a spending power, in the State of Maine of \$1.6 Billion. Investing in immigrants – and that's what we are

asking you to do here, to make an investment – makes good economic sense.

The Maine MultiCultural Center is currently working with 199 immigrants – 41 families, and 13 single individuals. About half of the individuals with whom we work, 84, are between the ages of 25 and 64 – prime working age. The rest are all under 24 – while some of those are also employed, the bulk are still in school or training and are an important part of our next generation of workers.

The work that we do, connecting new Mainers to local services and resources, helping them to acclimate and integrate into their new community, is accomplished largely through volunteers. In 2024 our 75 volunteers served 4,872.8 hours – an equivalent of 2.5 FTEs. Our staff is 3 FTEs. Volunteers provide a reach that our staff could not achieve by themselves. Volunteers, however, don't recruit, train, and manage themselves. The work is equally dependent on the expertise and management provided by our staff.

How are we doing? All children are enrolled in, regularly attending, and succeeding in school. And 80% of the employable adults

between the ages of 25 and 64 are employed in over 34 local businesses. One family has started their own business.

Although refugee resettlement has been paused for the moment, in his speech in the Rose Garden yesterday, President Trump acknowledged the need for more workers to come to the country “the right way”. Presumably refugees who are extensively vetted outside of the country before being allowed to enter would come under the category of those “entering the right way”. We have seen an increase recently in secondary migrants – refugees resettled in other parts of the country who are moving to the Bangor area. They are being drawn here by reports from family and friends who are happily settled in the area.

To date, only 2 single individual refugees have relocated to other parts of the country. This, along with our employment record, is exceptional. The reason for our success is our Volunteer Support Program. Our volunteer teams help us to provide wrap around services that get immigrants settled, employed, and integrated into the community quickly and successfully.

We have also been successful at forming partnerships in the community. Recently, partnering with Eastern Maine Development Corporation, we were selected New Growth Innovation Network

(funded in part by the DECD) for participation in an Inclusive Economic Investment project. During part I of the project we developed a plan for a business equity center that would provide technical assistance for small business from under-represented groups such as rural communities and immigrants. Our plan was 1 of 9 selected out of a nationwide field of 113, to progress to phase 2 of the program. We spent a year developing our proposal and building the partnerships necessary to bring it to fruition. We had received approval to submit a funding proposal to DECD with strong support from the regional office. Unfortunately, the climate has changed and that avenue of support is no longer open to us. 1 of our FTEs is currently funded through a subgrant with DECD funds and another ½ FTE is funded through HUD. What had once been reliable sources for us are no longer available to us. Fortunately, we are agile, and we know how to pivot. Building the relationships needed to successfully compete for funding from philanthropic and corporate sources, however, takes time. Our Board of Directors and I are actively engaged in doing that, and with 2 years of support from the State of Maine, I have no doubt that we can successfully make the transition.

Thank you all for your time and consideration today.