



IMMIGRANT LEGAL ADVOCACY PROJECT

April 17, 2025

**Testimony of Susan Roche, Executive Director of the Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project  
in Support of LD 1022: An Act to Increase Access to Justice in Civil Legal Aid Matters for  
Persons with Low Incomes**

Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee.

My name is Susan Roche, and I am the Executive Director of the Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project (ILAP). ILAP is Maine's only state-wide immigration legal aid organization. We have full-time offices in Portland and Lewiston and a regular presence across the state through our Rural Maine Project.

I am here to testify in support of LD 1022, an *Act to Increase Access to Justice in Civil Legal Aid Matters for Persons with Low Incomes*. ILAP is one of the seven organizations that would benefit from this funding to help low-income Mainers navigate our civil legal systems when they face life changing problems.

ILAP's mission is to help immigrants and asylum seekers navigate our complex legal system to gain work authorization and legal status, the first steps towards meeting basic needs, joining the workforce, and integrating safely into Maine communities.

Having an immigration lawyer can be the difference between having legal status in the U.S. and being deported back to a country where you face persecution and family separation. Statistics show that someone is five times more likely to win their case in immigration court if they have a lawyer. ILAP maintains a success rate of over 95% for cases reaching a final decision.

Each year, ILAP staff and volunteers help more than 3,000 clients from all 16 counties. Our clients include asylum seekers, immigrant children, survivors of domestic violence and trafficking, and more. In addition to our legal staff, we have more than 200 *pro bono* attorneys who donate over 5,000 hours of their time each year. Unfortunately, we still have to turn away hundreds of people each year because we lack the capacity to serve them.

For ILAP, the Maine Civil Legal Services Fund (MCLSF) is our only form of recurring government funding. We are ineligible for most federal funding because of the clients we serve. So, we rely upon private donors and funders for most of our support, and that funding is subject to shifting priorities and changing donor interests.

The one-time funding increase we received in 2024-2025 allowed us to expand our Asylum Assistance and Legal Orientation Project, and so far, we have assisted over 550 people in filing their asylum applications and more than 3,100 new arrivals attended our legal orientations. We

also expanded our Immigrant Children's Project, helping hundreds of vulnerable young people gain legal status so they can graduate, go to college and build successful lives here in Maine. We also helped more clients through our Rural Maine Project, meeting people where they are in their communities to provide critical immigration information and legal assistance.

Losing this funding could not come at a worse time, when immigrant communities in Maine and throughout the country are the target of a mass deportation and detention campaign, when lawful paths to legal status are being eliminated, and when due process and the rule of law are being eroded. Even here in Maine, we have seen ICE arresting and detaining unaccompanied children, those with no criminal history, and those with pending cases. If ILAP is not here to defend their rights, no one will be. We need more capacity and not less. Without legal representation, thousands of Mainers could be ripped from their homes and our workforce to be detained and deported without ever understanding their legal rights or having the opportunity to apply for status that they are legally qualified for.

I ask that you vote to support LD 1022 to invest in ILAP and civil legal aid in Maine during these unprecedented times when low-income Mainers need legal protections more than ever.