

Good afternoon, Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and honorable members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Sarah Harber and I live in Portland. I was born and raised from the midcoast to southern Maine. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in favor of both LD 1259 and LD 1971.

I am a mental health therapist and substance use clinician serving Mainers of all backgrounds in southern Maine. I have the privilege of supporting clients with diverse immigration experiences and have specifically worked with Latinx youth and adults for almost fifteen years. As a provider, my first priority is to keep the individuals who consult me, as well as the larger community, safe from harm.

I have concerns about the potential for future partnerships between ICE and local law enforcement because I regularly accompany individuals and families who already feel challenged in reaching out to emergency services to meet their most basic needs and concerns for safety. Many families, regardless of their immigration status, experience the possibility of family separation, of arrest and deportation, as a daily threat. This hardship can cause toxic stress, affecting their emotional, physical and cognitive health and interfering with family routines, rituals and care. They may even experience symptoms of traumatic stress response.

Across the US, areas that have experienced internal immigration enforcement, programs such as 287 (g), have documented the impact on immigrant communities, particularly for immigrant youth, who display higher levels of emotional distress, leading to greater rates of depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. There has been an increase in distrust in community services on the whole, contributing to the likelihood that families are less likely to seek out health programs, resulting in worsened health outcomes overall.

Blurring the line between ICE and other institutions would dissolve the trust that has been built through time and relationship in our neighborhoods because trauma dictates a very different relationship to life-saving services. With the threat of immigration enforcement, the people I meet with are not going to call for help if, for example, a young person is being harmed or threatening to take their life, or is going hungry. They are not going to call the police if they are experiencing violence by a partner or witnessing someone else in the community experiencing violence. Or if the older neighbor down the street hasn't left his home in several days and there is cause for concern. They are not going to call emergency services if someone you or I love is

overdosing or in any kind of trouble. And as a mental health provider, I too might be less likely to call emergency on their behalf, because I can't guarantee the safety of their family if ICE is involved. I can't risk putting people I support in the position that might cause further harm. And while I would like to share more personal stories with you today, I stand here with a certain amount of fear about retaliation myself, and it pales in comparison to what the people I treat feel and experience.

I have concerns about the welfare of our towns and cities if we are not able to prioritize everyone's needs for safety. Trauma has reverberations in our society and consequences for the future and we have to look no farther than the stories of our immigrant neighbors who have experienced trauma in their own places of birth to understand the impact of not having access to basic safety, trust, and community.

Immigrants are our co-workers, our neighbors, our family, our leaders. They make up a significant part of the labor force, and contribute to our school districts. This bill gives Maine the opportunity to maintain the health and safety of our communities by recognizing that joining ICE and local law enforcement is a conflict of interest. We have the **opportunity** in Maine to put the safety and well-being of all Mainers first by protecting immigrant families. We have the **choice** to maintain safe cities and towns with strong community bonds and emergency preparedness. We have the **duty** to raise healthy communities, where all people can get their basic needs met without fear of persecution.

I urge you to vote in favor of LD 1259 to keep our communities safe and healthy. Thank you for your time.

Sources:

Lemon ED, Mero Nieto, KS, Serrano Laguna LY, et al. "I Can Never Feel Safe." *Latinx Youth Voices on Psychosocial Impacts of 287 (g)*. In Georgia. *Health Education & Behavior*. 2023; 51 (1):71-81.

Rhodes SD, Mann L, Simán FM, Son E, Alonzo J, Downs M, Lawlor E, Martinez O, Sun CJ, O'Brien MC, Reboussin BA, Hall MA. The impact of local immigration enforcement policies on the health of immigrant hispanics/latinos in the US. *Am J Public Health*. 2015 Feb; 105 (2): 329-37.