

Jane Makela, Esq.

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

My name is Jane Makela and I live in the town of Falmouth. I urge passage of this bill, LD 1259, based on both my faith and my experience as a pro bono asylum lawyer.

My faith is Unitarian Universalism. Like other people of faith you will hear from today, we believe that every person is inherently worthy and has the right to flourish with dignity, wherever their origin and whatever their immigration status.

As a lawyer, I have devoted the last decade of my practice exclusively to pro bono work for New Mainers, most of them asylum seekers. That experience is relevant to this bill because I know what their experience has been with the police in their home countries and how important it is that they have a different one here.

In my clients' countries of origin, law enforcement entities are often the reason my clients fled. The US State Department Human Rights Report for the African country of my last client described police there being directly responsive to a repressive and corrupt government and involved in torture and extrajudicial killings of detainees, arbitrary arrests and more. For immigrants from such countries, a working criminal justice system and local police focused on public safety are concepts they must slowly come to trust when they get here.

I have respect and gratitude for Maine's local law enforcement agencies, and I want to recognize, in particular, the police department of Yarmouth, where my church is located. Our congregation assists New Mainers, mostly with housing in Yarmouth, as they make a new start. When we shared with the police department how worried these individuals were by rumors of ICE sweeping up immigrants, detaining and deporting them regardless of immigration status, and described their confusion as to who might show up at their door to do that, the department understood the need to clarify for them the separation between ICE mass-deportation campaigns and the responsibilities of the town police department. They invited these New Mainers to come down the street to the police headquarters and meet some of the officers so they would recognize them and perhaps know some by name if they saw them in town or needed to call on them.

That's how trust is built.

Contrast this attitude with the acting director of ICE who said recently that his dream for ICE was squads of trucks rounding up immigrants for deportation the same way Amazon trucks crisscross American cities delivering packages.

We can be the Maine that helps ICE treat immigrants as parcels to fill deportation quotas or we can be the Maine that says we value immigrants and want them to

know they will be treated by our local police departments no differently from any other resident there, regardless of immigration status.

I want to live in that second Maine, and this bill helps assure that we will.

I urge you to vote that it ought to pass.

Thank you,
Jane Makela