

My name is Jae Echeverría. I was born in Waldo County, Maine and currently live in Waldo County. I support bill LD1259 and I support bill LD1971. I grew up in a family with substance dependency. My household was unsafe. I spent the majority of my youth transitioning between kind families in my community who took me in temporarily. I was labeled a transitory homeless youth. As a teen, I lived in Portland. My neighbors and best friends took me in. They are a Dinka family from South Sudan. They received zero government funding to raise me. They were the first family to recognize that I was afraid eating would make a family not want me because I cost too much money. They encouraged me to stop asking permission to live in their home and eat food. They called me their child and became my chosen family. They always asked about my biological family and encouraged me to call my mum. My chosen parents never tried to take my mother's role despite understanding she could not raise me. Growing up in the South Sudani community in Portland, I saw Dinka, Acholi, Nuer and more immigrant communities transform the old city into the beautiful metropolis we see today. Immigrants run the tourist economy: the hotels, the restaurants, everything that put Portland on the cover of real estate and travel magazines in the early two thousands can be attributed to immigrant laborers. I had a safer and more fulfilled childhood because Dinka people are here in Maine. I owe it to the people who raised me when being a straight A student made me an invisible concern to the system. I owe it to immigrants that I am alive and well today. There is a culture of community care and collective care for children in South Sudan that we benefit from and having here in Maine. I benefited from Dinka cultural values. Dinka cultural values kept me alive. For these reasons and many more, I support both bills LD1259 and LD1971.