

Public Comment: LD 2106

Introduction:

Good afternoon Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Gwen Walsh, and I am a resident of Readfield. I am the Confidential Resource Advisor for Maine's seven Community Colleges. I have a masters degree in Clinical Psychology from Columbia University, and I am a researcher in the field of clinical psychology. I am providing testimony in support of LD 2106.

Comment:

I am here today to express my deep concern for the negative public health, public safety, and mental health implications of ICE's new operation in Maine. I work with students across the state, including students in South Portland and Lewiston/Auburn. Many community college students already face multiple obstacles and challenges in accessing higher education. The students' resilience amazes me every day, but no amount of dedication to their education can protect students from ICE agents invading their place of learning and threatening their safety.

All students should feel safe in pursuing education and vocational training. The students in Maine's community colleges, in particular, are working toward careers that contribute directly to the safety and well-being of the people of Maine. However, because of ICE agents' flagrant disrespect for the safety of citizens and non-citizens alike, some students are now afraid to come to campus. This doesn't just threaten students' ability to get their education and pursue fulfilling careers. Living in near-constant fear and isolation creates not only a public safety crisis, but a mental health crisis as well. Psychological theory and research, from Maslow's hierarchy of needs to Albert Bandura's social learning theory, indicates that safety and social connection are fundamental human needs. As the people of Maine, we have a responsibility to protect our neighbors, especially in the places where they should feel the safest.

LD 2106 protects people accessing services at these sensitive locations, as well as the people who work there. LD 2106 would provide important clarity and guidance to workers at these places that immigration officers are prohibited from entering these locations without a valid judicial warrant, and workers at these places are not allowed to provide voluntary consent to all immigration officers to enter.

The current actions of ICE do not make our communities safer. They threaten public safety as a whole, especially for our most vulnerable neighbors. As a higher education professional, I urge the committee to protect our students, our workers, and our fellow community members.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I'm happy to answer any questions.

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