

TESTIMONY OF MUFALO CHITAM SUPPORTING LD 174:

An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Ending Hunger by 2030 Advisory Group

Public hearing scheduled for Tuesday, Jan 18, 2022, at 11:00 am

Sponsor: **Representative Bill PLUECKER of Warren**

Link: <https://legislature.maine.gov/bills/getPDF.asp?paper=HP0127&item=1&snum=130>

I am here to testify in support of LD174 on behalf of the board and members of the Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition (MIRC), a coalition of more than 80 member organizations with a commitment to advancing and defending the rights of immigrants. Our mission is to improve the legal, social, and economic conditions experienced by Maine's immigrants – enhancing their lives while strengthening Maine – through advocacy, information sharing, and collaboration both through and among our member organizations.

We actively prioritize the voices, perspectives, and decision-making of New Mainer communities as we acknowledge the status quo of systems that consistently disadvantage them. MIRC envisions policies that will not exacerbate inequities across BIPOC groups, including divisions across the country of origin, socioeconomic status, state geography, language, and immigration status.

MIRC is a council member of the "Everyone at the Table: Ending Hunger in Maine by 2030" initiative. We helped to craft this plan and the recommendations that were made, and we have reviewed it. This experience of being part of the planning process has given us confidence in it being a plan that accurately reflects the needs and priorities of Maine people, including the communities we serve at MIRC.

Our organization has been working in crisis mode since 2019 as we continue to serve the hundreds of asylum-seekers who are entering our state. These immigrants (with a lot of pregnant women) coming to Maine from the Southern borders are presenting with so many health issues, malnourished, dehydrated after traveling through many countries. One of the biggest challenges has been finding ways to adequately feed them in a healthy and culturally appropriate way, especially given the lack of systems to support such efforts with limited cooking structures and funds available to them in temporary housing. MIRC has been providing ethnic-cultural appropriate hot dinner meals and cultural brokering for 6 days at Howard Johnson, Comfort, and Quality Inn Motels in partnership with members from Burundian, Congolese, Angolan, Malawian, and Zambia ethnic communities to over 500 homeless newly arrived asylum seeker immigrants.

This sort of crisis mode is not sustainable in the long-term, however. The goals established by the "Ending Hunger by 2030" initiative will help create systems that are equitable. We are especially encouraged by the commitment of collaboration across sectors and experience (including government, impacted people & communities, the private sector, and nonprofit & community groups such as ours).

Therefore, the Maine Immigrant Rights Coalition (MIRC) supports LD174 this bill and urges the Maine Legislators to pass it.

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