

New Mainers Community Testimony in support of LD 963

New Mainers immigrated from many countries in Africa and Asia to make Maine their home more than two decades ago. The transition and adaptation of the life in Maine was not an easy experience. The newcomers faced many challenges, including adapting to the snow and the cold weather in Maine.

Over the years, New Mainers immigrants learned the language, attended adult education classes, and started paying taxes and contributing to Maine's economy by replacing work force losses due to the retirement of baby boomers.

The tight-knit fabric of the New Mainers' families added fresh, eager to work, young helping hands to many areas of Maine economy, especially the labor, service sector, the health care services, and many other vital economic activities.

New Mainers youth became important participants in our schools, community colleges, and universities, enlisting new students in different classes every year. While many cities and towns around New England are losing population, the immigrant centers helped the population numbers grow.

At the same time as the New Mainers adapted to a new way of life, some of the youngest members of the community have fallen prey to the more dangerous elements of society, including contact with criminal enterprises. These activities, among others, have led to a high rate of young New Mainers in the juvenile detention population.

One of the challenges for New Mainers is that children serve as the cultural brokers; parents lack understanding of how to navigate the system. When issues of drug addiction or petty criminal activities arise, parents lack access and understanding to help their children navigate the situation.

In addition, young New Mainers are often incarcerated for committing petty crimes or for failing to turn up for a court date. Once an arrest warrant is issued and a youth spends a few days in jail, they can easily be caught in a downward spiral. Their experience in juvenile detention programs (specifically at Long Creek) can make it more, rather than less, likely that they will engage in further and more serious crimes.

We are particularly concerned about youth who are currently in detention and who lack a re-entry and rehabilitation plan at the end of their sentence. New Mainer offenders face particular barriers to rehabilitation. New Mainer families have difficulty accepting youth upon their return. The cultural stigma is such that many young offenders are shunned. A culturally appropriate rehabilitation program is urgently needed to facilitate reintegration into the community and to help young offenders find ways forward through education or the workplace.

The percentage of New Mainers among incarcerated Juveniles is higher than the population share of the New Mainers. In order to break this cycle and find ways to rehabilitate and help reform incarcerated young immigrant girls and boys, the community is joining hands with the authorities to help create a successful re-entry program. This program will create culturally

adequate halfway homes focused on understanding the individual need of each incarcerated Juvenile/young adult to bring them safely back to the community and help them contribute positively to Maine economy.

We would welcome an approach to juvenile rehabilitation that takes account of the social and linguistic isolation of many New Mainer families and that seeks multi-generational solutions including family and parents.

We the people signing below strongly support LD 963 and urge the law makers to pass it into law.

Yours faithfully

New Mainers Community and supporters:

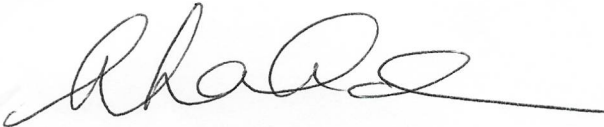
Name phone city of residence

1) Andrew Robinson - 754-8582 Farmington

2) District Attorney for District 3

3) AMINA MOHAMMAD 276 PINE STREET

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④ Hussein H. Ahmed 

Community members: strong advocates and supporters for the bill LD 963. "An Act to Create Culturally Sensitive Treatment and Recovery Halfway Houses for Immigrants Transitioning out of the Juvenile Justice System" sponsored by Rep.


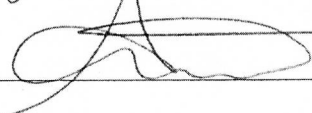
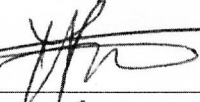

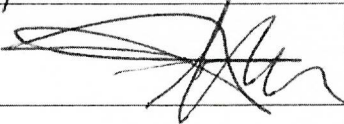
Heidi Brooks of Lewiston

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I am submitting this on behave of the people who signed this document.