



April 22, 2021 testimony in support of Legislative Document 1329

To: Members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

From: Leani García Torres, Associate Director, State & Local Initiatives, New American Economy

My name is Leani García Torres, and I am the Associate Director of State and Local Initiatives at New American Economy (NAE), a bipartisan research and advocacy organization fighting for smart and humane federal, state, and local immigration policies that help grow our economy and create jobs for all Americans.

I am testifying in support of the creation of a Career Advancement and Navigation Initiative in Maine's Department of Education. To this end, I respectfully encourage the passage of LD 1329, which would reduce barriers to career advancement for Mainers, including immigrants and refugees.

Over the past several years, my organization has worked with leaders in government, business, and civil society across the country to recognize the crucial role immigrants are playing in state and local economies, including in some of the fastest-growing and most in-demand fields like healthcare, education, and social work.

According to a report that NAE authored with the Migration Policy Institute and World Education Services, the underemployment of immigrants and refugees with college degrees results in more than \$39.4 billion in foregone annual earnings and \$10.2 billion in foregone federal, state, and local tax revenue. In order to remain competitive and meet critical workforce shortages, Maine will need to implement policies that not only attract and retain immigrant talent that complements U.S.-born workers, but also builds career pathways for the immigrants and refugees already living in the state.

To help illustrate why this measure is so important, and why it makes sense to reduce barriers and provide tailored career navigation for new Mainers, my organization has conducted quantitative research on the impact immigrants and refugees already have on the state. What we found is striking. As of 2019:

- **Maine is home to more than 49,500 immigrants, making up 3.7 percent of the state's population.** These new Americans are critical to addressing the state's workforce shortages across the skills and education spectrum, with 68.8 percent of immigrant Mainers being of working age (ages 16-64) compared to 62.4 percent of their U.S.-born counterparts, and more than one in five immigrants holding a bachelor's degree or higher.
- **Immigrants paid \$464.4 million in taxes — including \$151.9 million in state and local taxes — and held \$1.2 billion in spending power that is reinjected into the state's economy.**

- **Immigrants fill critical workforce shortages in high-need industries.** While immigrants make up under 4 percent of Maine’s population, they represent 6.2 percent of the state’s home health aides.

As more Mainers reach retirement age, it is critical to retain and leverage internationally trained professionals. By providing support and services to help underemployed and unemployed individuals acquire additional education, skills, and licensure, these professionals can join Maine’s workforce and help meet the state’s growing talent needs.

Maine is in a position to take decisive action to support and leverage the skills of the state’s future workforce. I encourage the Committee to support the passage of LD 1329.

Thank you for your consideration,

Leani García Torres
Associate Director, State & Local Initiatives
New American Economy