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Falmouth

Sen. Daughtry, Rep. Brennan and members of the Committee.

The greatest threat to Maine's economy and quality of life is its aging demographics. Even if we retained every high school graduate in Maine, we would not have adequate numbers of qualified workers to fill the jobs that will be vacated in the coming decade.

Through my employer (MEMIC) and as a previous Chair of the Board of Visitors of the University of Southern Maine, I have presented the case for attracting and retaining new Americans for the sake of Maine's future. The fact is that we will not adequately succeed in replenishing the workforce from other New England states or other regions of the country. Our best hope for qualified workers requires us to move everyone into the workforce at the level they are trained and qualified to perform. This bill helps address the challenges currently faced by our new neighbors - language, credentials and social capital.

While this is not an easy lift at a time that immigrants have been demonized by some, the alternative is far worse in terms of economic stagnation. Though the pandemic has created a surplus labor pool in the short term, the aging of Maine has not changed. As the economy recovers, there will be another labor shortage. Hopefully, with this bill we will help move the Rwandan PhD from janitorial services to a research role, the Polish mechanical engineer from housekeeping to an engineering firm and the Iranian shift worker to their previous success as a social services administrator.

Underemployment can and must be addressed but it requires funding. I hope you will work this bill into an acceptable form that has more than the majority of votes to pass. Thank you for your consideration.