



April 22, 2021

LD 1329 An Act To Establish the Career Advancement and Navigation Initiative in the Department of Education To Lower Barriers to Career Advancement

Senator Daughtry, Rep. Brennan and Members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Anita St. Onge. I am the Executive Director of Portland Adult Education (PAE) and I am pleased to be speaking in support of LD 1329.

This bill supports the establishment of career navigators in a number of areas of the state.

In 2013 the Maine Legislature invested \$75,000/year to establish the New Mainers Resource Center (NMRC), a program within PAE. The funding allowed PAE to hire a coordinator who works with foreign-trained professionals who are hoping to find employment in Maine that allows them to maximize their foreign credentials and training. In the past 7 years that program has assisted thousands of foreign-trained professionals to advance their careers in the State of Maine. Furthermore, this minimal investment has allowed the NMRC Coordinator, Sally Sutton, to seek grants to build on the programs that existed at PAE with a particular focus on professionals with post-secondary degrees and/or significant work experience.

Last November the NMRC released a report with findings and recommendations aimed at reducing the barriers that foreign trained health professionals face in obtaining employment in the healthcare field. (press release with a link to the report included in my testimony). Since that time Sally and her staff have presented to numerous boards and committees and have been working with state and private employers and agencies to implement the recommendations found in the report.

The NMRC has also focused on sector specific training programs like the Education Academy (allowing people who were teachers in their home countries to become Education technicians or teachers in Maine) and the Teller Training Program (a partnership with Maine financial institutions to allow students to advance in the financial field).

While our Hub will not be receiving funds from this bill, I urge you to continue to invest in our Adult Education programs to provide meaningful support for individuals who are trying to advance their careers.

Thank you for consideration of my testimony. I urge Ought to Pass on LD 1329. Anita St. Onge, Executive Director, Portland Adult Education, [stonga@portlandschools.org](mailto:stonga@portlandschools.org).

**Press release, November 2020**

## **New Report Provides Framework for Reducing Barriers for Maine's Foreign Trained Health Professionals**

PORTLAND, Maine – The New Mainers Resource Center (NMRC) at Portland Adult Education (PAE) has released a report with findings and recommendations aimed to reduce the barriers that foreign trained health professionals face in obtaining employment in the healthcare field.

“Our findings show that doctors, nurses and other health professionals who have been trained and worked in another country face many hurdles to working in their professions in Maine,” states Sally Sutton, New Mainers Resource Center Program Coordinator. “Unfortunately, there is not one quick and easy fix to this problem. It is our hope that with the recommendations in this report, we have helped to lay the framework for the wide range of steps that those involved in Maine’s healthcare workforce system need to take.”

Interested stakeholders include: healthcare employers, colleges and universities, adult education programs, licensing boards, immigrant groups, workforce and economic development programs, health professional associations, public and private funders and policy makers.

The recommendations from this report come at a critical time as Maine’s healthcare systems struggle with COVID-19 and disparity in health continues among minority populations. Establishing quicker and more cost-effective pathways for immigrant healthcare professionals to return to practice could result in a significant increase in the diversity and cultural competency of the state’s healthcare workforce, which is one way to begin addressing these health disparities.

Implementation of the recommendations in the report will address the state’s need for healthcare workers in a number of ways. Implementation of the recommendations will:

- Help foreign trained healthcare workers reach their highest potential
- Address the state’s goal to achieve a diverse, equitable and inclusive workforce
- Meet the needs of healthcare employers, and address the state’s healthcare workforce shortages
- Attract skilled healthcare workers to Maine.

Funding for the Foreign Trained Health Professional Licensing Pilot Project research came from the Maine Health Access Foundation.

Implementation of the recommendations of this report will help to guide the future direction of Portland Adult Education as it seeks to build on its current work, expertise, and role as Maine’s Welcome Back Center. It will also build on the health professional



training and workforce partnerships and initiatives that already exist at Portland Adult Education. Expanded support and investment in this program will provide Maine with a more coordinated and better-funded healthcare sector workforce approach to better serve both new Mainer healthcare professionals and healthcare employers.

“By combining these efforts into a coordinated, sector-focused program, Portland Adult Education will be better able to achieve its vision of a program that serves any immigrant or refugee who has previously been a healthcare professional, or who wants a career in the healthcare field, by providing the guidance, support, training, and opportunities necessary to achieve their desired position,” states PAE Executive Director, Anita St. Onge.

For copies of the report go to:

Report of the [\*Foreign Trained Health Professional Licensing Pilot Project\*](#)

For more information contact:

- Sally Sutton, NMRC Program Coordinator, [suttos@portlandschools.org](mailto:suttos@portlandschools.org), 207 370-9616
- Anita St. Onge, PAE Executive Director, [stonga@portlschools.org](mailto:stonga@portlschools.org), 207 671-7920