



April 22, 2021

Senator Joe Rafferty  
Representative Michael Brennan  
Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs  
Cross Building, Room 208  
Augusta, ME 04333

Submitted via Legislature's Testimony Submissions portal

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

Dear Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and Honorable Members of the Committee:

I direct the Maine Business Immigration Coalition (MeBIC). MeBIC is Maine's only resource dedicated to providing information, education and advocacy on immigration and related issues from and for the business and economic perspective. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of LD 1329.

As you are well aware, Maine's labor supply is shrinking as baby boomers retire and as Maine's birthrates have fallen. The pandemic has not changed the fact that Maine's employers say that finding workers is still one of their greatest challenges. Maine needs a vibrant workforce if the state is to be competitive and have a strong economic future. Immigrants to Maine are key to our state's population growth and our ability to stem the state's workforce shrinkage. This has been recognized in the [Maine Economic Development Strategy 2020-2029](#) and by the Governor's Economic Recovery Committee.

More recently, recognizing immigrants' importance to Maine's economy, nearly 100 Maine businesses, chambers of commerce, trade associations, and higher education institutions have signed the [Maine Compact on Immigration](#) (attached) urging state leaders to "adopt policies and practices to help Maine become a destination of choice for immigrants to the U.S. and that provide an environment where immigrants can reach their full potential in our state."

LD 1329 is exactly the type of policy change that the signers of the Compact envision. Many of Maine's first generation immigrants face significant barriers to entering or advancing in Maine's workforce. These include limited English, unfamiliarity with U.S. work culture, no connections to help "network" their way into a job, challenges gaining recognition of their credentials and experience acquired abroad, or having skills that aren't a match for the jobs available in Maine right now. Each of the four adult education hubs specified in LD 1329 have

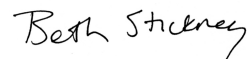
seen large increases in the numbers of immigrants seeking help to learn English, get a high school degree when their own degree isn't recognized, and to obtain guidance towards employment and a career. But these adult education programs don't have the financial resources to add capacity in response to the growing demand from both immigrants and so many other Mainers facing barriers to entering or succeeding in Maine's workforce.

LD 1329's Career Advancement and Navigation Initiative creates a thoughtful collaborative low-barrier workforce development resource available to un- and underemployed Mainers, or to those who need reskilling and upskilling. With Maine's employers clamoring for talent at every skill level, there is no excuse for the state not to invest in this initiative. The investment will be more than repaid through increased workforce participation, higher earnings and income tax revenues, lower public benefits spending, and more importantly, stronger communities when individuals are able to have the dignity of working to their fullest potential.

It's time for the state to take intentional, affirmative steps to make sure that all people can succeed in Maine. LD 1329 makes great strides in that direction.

I urge the Committee to vote "ought to pass" on LD 1329.

Sincerely,



Beth Stickney, Esq.  
Executive Director



## MAINE COMPACT *on* IMMIGRATION

The **Maine Compact on Immigration** is a bipartisan initiative by members of Maine's business community and higher education institutions to promote immigration policies that will strengthen our economy and communities, attract and retain global talent, and bring new entrepreneurs, businesses and workers to our nation and state. The Compact's principles reflect the signatories' vision of commonsense and future-focused federal immigration reforms that reaffirm the country's commitment to remaining a nation that welcomes immigrants, and that address the realities of our state's and nation's workforce needs and demographic challenges. These principles also affirm the signatories' support for state and local policies and practices that recognize the myriad economic contributions immigrants make as volunteers, consumers, students, workers, entrepreneurs, taxpayers, and civically engaged citizens, strengthening Maine's communities and economy.

We urge Maine's congressional delegation and state leaders to adopt the principles of the Maine Compact on Immigration to guide the immigration discussion in our state. Furthermore, we encourage state and local leaders to follow suit with policies, practices and programs that create welcoming communities in Maine.

### **Maine Compact on Immigration Principles:**

- 1. FEDERAL SOLUTIONS:** Immigration policy is a federal issue with profound impact on states and the economy. We urge Maine's congressional delegation to lead aggressive efforts to enact immigration reforms that update and vastly improve our nation's outdated immigration system, protect our borders while preserving due process and human rights, and facilitate trade. Maine will thrive with a federal immigration system that is flexible enough to address the needs of businesses, while protecting the interests of both foreign-born and native-born workers.
- 2. STRENGTHENING OUR ECONOMY & WORKFORCE:** For our state economy to grow and compete, Maine needs a robust workforce and policies that prioritize attracting and retaining global talent. This necessitates a federal immigration system that is both responsive to, and effective at, meeting the demands of Maine's economy and the sectors that drive growth in our state. We also call on state leaders to adopt policies and practices to help Maine become a destination of choice for immigrants to the U.S. and that provide an environment where immigrants can reach their full potential in our state.
- 3. FAMILY:** Strong families are critical to developing successful individuals and cohesive communities. Federal immigration policies should prioritize keeping families together in order to ensure the most supportive home environments for all children in our country and across our state.
- 4. A COMMONSENSE APPROACH:** Immigrants have always been, and remain, an important part of our communities. We must adopt a commonsense approach to immigration that reflects our long-established values and recognizes the critical role that immigration has played in the history, culture, and economy of both our state and the nation. Federal immigration policies must provide

sensible and fair paths forward for immigrants wishing to come to the U.S. to find opportunity and to work, to join their immediate families, and to seek refuge from persecution. Our immigration laws must also include a path towards citizenship for those already here who lack legal status and who are of good character, pay taxes, and are committed to becoming fully participating members of our society and culture.

- 5. EFFECTIVE ENFORCEMENT:** We support a federal immigration enforcement strategy that emphasizes public safety, targets serious crime, safeguards witnesses and victims, keeps families together whenever possible, and considers the interests of and unintended consequences to businesses, the workforce, and communities. Local law enforcement resources should focus on criminal activities, not on civil violations of federal code.
  
- 6. STRONG COMMUNITIES:** Communities that grow and attract talent are the ones that are welcoming to all. We support state and local policies, practices and programs that provide a welcoming environment for immigrants and offer all residents the tools and opportunities they need to succeed.

**Signatories**

Adele Masengo Designs	Bigelow Laboratory for Ocean Sciences	Eastern Maine Development Corporation
American Roots	Bowdoin College	Educate Maine
Androscoggin Bank	C. Love Cookie Project/ C. Love Baking School	Fisherman's Net
Associated General Contractors of Maine	Cabot7	Focus Maine
Austin Street Brewery	Cambium	Fogtown Brewing Co.
Axiom	Catama Productions	Geiger
Bangor Region Chamber of Commerce	Central Maine Power	Goodwill Industries of Northern New England
Bangor Savings Bank	Coastal Enterprises, Inc. (CEI)	Gorham Savings Bank
Bar Harbor Chamber of Commerce	Coffee by Design	Greater Portland Immigrant Welcome Center
Bates College	Colby College	GWI (Great Works Internet)
Bernstein Shur	Common Census	Hancock Lumber
BerryDunn	Community Concepts Finance Corporation	Hospitality Maine
Biddeford-Saco Chamber of Commerce & Industry	Dead River	Hussey Seating

<b>IntWork, LLC</b>	<b>MaineHealth</b>	<b>Sappi North America</b>
<b>Jasper Wyman &amp; Sons</b>	<b>Mandy Levine Consulting, LLC</b>	<b>Sebasco Harbor Resort</b>
<b>Lee Auto Malls</b>	<b>Manufacturers Association of Maine</b>	<b>Southern Midcoast Chamber of Commerce</b>
<b>Lee International</b>	<b>MEMIC</b>	<b>Spurwink</b>
<b>Lewiston-Auburn Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce</b>	<b>Northern Light Health</b>	<b>St. Joseph's College</b>
<b>Live and Work in Maine</b>	<b>ON Semiconductor</b>	<b>St.Germain</b>
<b>Lucro Management</b>	<b>Orono Brewing</b>	<b>The Jackson Laboratory</b>
<b>Luke's Lobster</b>	<b>Pan Tim Wood Products</b>	<b>Thomas College</b>
<b>Maine Beer Company</b>	<b>Penobscot Community Health Care</b>	<b>Tilson</b>
<b>Maine Business Immigration Coalition (MeBIC)</b>	<b>Portland Regional Chamber of Commerce</b>	<b>TRSS Wealth Management</b>
<b>Maine Center for Entrepreneurs</b>	<b>Portland Yacht Services</b>	<b>Tyson / Barber Foods</b>
<b>Maine College of Art</b>	<b>Preti Flaherty</b>	<b>Union River Lobster Pot</b>
<b>Maine Community Action Partnership</b>	<b>ProSearch</b>	<b>University of New England</b>
<b>Maine Dairy Farmers Association</b>	<b>Rainbow Construction, Inc.</b>	<b>Unum Group</b>
<b>Maine Grocers &amp; Food Producers Association</b>	<b>Ready Seafood</b>	<b>Valico Group</b>
<b>Maine Health Care Association</b>	<b>Retail Association of Maine</b>	<b>Verrill Dana</b>
<b>Maine State Chamber of Commerce</b>	<b>Revision Energy</b>	<b>VETRO FiberMap</b>
<b>Maine Stream Finance</b>	<b>Rising Tide Brewing Co.</b>	<b>WEX</b>
<b>Maine Tourism Association</b>	<b>Rosemont Market &amp; Bakery</b>	<b>Wild Blueberry Commission of Maine</b>
	<b>RSC Consulting</b>	