

Testimony re LD320 “Resolve, to Establish the Maine Multicultural Center Welcome Center Initiative”

My name is Dennis Chinoy I’ve been a longtime volunteer with WIN, Welcoming Immigrant Neighbors, which is now incorporated into the Maine Multicultural Center as the direct services component for immigrants to the Bangor area. I volunteer with MMCC, as well

I can attest that MMCC is an organization whose core of extremely dedicated, community-engaged and talented volunteers have been working for some years now to ensure that newcomers to our community can access the social, logistical, educational, medical & other critical resources they need to navigate, and to integrate well into our community. And to package that in a warm welcome for people now far from home. We are not case workers, but nevertheless work to provide that kind of wrap-around care such a welcome requires. Bangor’s designation as a refugee-re-settlement site by Catholic Charities, Maine’s federal agency that oversees Refugee Immigrant Services, has been largely on the strength of MMCC's work.

The migration of immigrants to Maine, as we know, encompasses a broad spectrum ranging from those with few resources in flight from duress in their home countries, to well trained professionals seeking economic opportunity here. MMCC welcomes them all. In the case of foreign-trained workers, their ability to succeed, and hopefully stay to continue to enhance the strength of our local economy, depends on the multi-faceted support we can help provide. MMCC has already done critical groundwork in this preparation and has developed relationships with other community entities which this work must involve.

Until recently MMCC has done this work with not a penny of public funds from local, state or federal sources. Going forward, as the numbers of New Mainers accelerate, the only way this work can be sustainably accomplished is to add dollars to the volunteer expertise and compassion that has powered it thus far.

We’ve watched as the numbers of immigrants to southern Maine has spiked and how Portland and other communities have strained to accommodate them. In the Bangor area we have a fairly short window to be proactive in contending with what will be a northward flow of New Mainers. That impending influx does not depend on whether these funds are approved. They are here, and they are coming. However, the Bangor area’s ability to sustainably contend with and to integrate refugees arriving here **very much** depends on your approval of these funds. I urge you to approve them.

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