



April 5, 2021

Re: Support for LD 149

Dear Chairs Curry and Roberts, Members of the Committee on Innovation, Economic Advancement and Business, and Bill Sponsor Representative Cloutier,

World Education Services (WES) is a non-profit social enterprise dedicated to helping immigrants, refugees, and international students achieve their educational and career goals in the United States and Canada. WES evaluates international educational qualifications, supports the integration of immigrants into the workforce, and provides philanthropic funding to immigrant-serving organizations.

WES strongly supports LD 149, which would open pathways to licensure for immigrants and refugees with international experience and education.

Data shows there is a robust pipeline of talented individuals struggling to contribute their education and experience to the U.S. workforce. More than 2 million immigrants and refugees with a college degree or higher are under- or unemployed. The immigrants and refugees with international credentials who comprise just over half of this group are substantially more likely to face barriers to employment commensurate with their experience than their U.S.-educated counterparts. According to a report by the Migration Policy Institute, *New American Economy*, and WES, 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.

This is a pivotal moment. Communities across the U.S., including in Maine, face disparities in access to experienced licensed professionals across essential sectors, including in the health care workforce. In the next five years, as more of Maine's workforce nears retirement age, the state will need to fill 158,000 open jobs. Qualified immigrants and refugees who are underemployed are poised to fill these shortages yet face barriers to recognition of their international credentials. LD 149 would address this and help Maine to bolster its workforce.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit a statement in support of LD 149.

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