

Testimony in Support of LD 149, “An Act To Facilitate Licensure for Credentialed Individuals from Other Jurisdictions”

March 23, 2021

James Myall, Policy Analyst

Dear Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, and Members of the Joint Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement, and Business. My name is James Myall, and I am writing in support of LD 149, “An Act To Facilitate Licensure for Credentialed Individuals from Other Jurisdictions” on behalf of the Maine Center for Economic Policy.

MECEP supports LD 149 because immigrants should be able to make full use of their past experience, skills, and credentials — not only so they and their families can prosper, but to build a stronger economy for all Mainers.

LD 149 would give Maine’s Commissioner of Professional and Financial Regulation broader authority to recognize foreign credentials and occupations held by Maine residents. In effect, this allows the Commissioner to develop rules to allow New Mainers to transfer foreign licenses or credentials more easily. This would make it easier for New Mainers to find employment suitable to their education and prior professional experience.

MECEP’s research finds that lack of recognition for foreign credentials and qualifications are a significant barrier to the earnings and employment potential of New Mainers. In the report *State of Working Maine 2020*,¹ MECEP compared the employment prospects of immigrants who were over the age of 25 when they arrived in the United States with US-born residents and those who immigrated to the US before they reached 25 years of age.

Mainers of color who immigrated to the US after they turned 25, (and were thus more likely to have obtained their degree in another country) were substantially more likely to be employed in a non-college job than those who were born in the United States or who immigrated earlier in life (and were thus more likely to have obtained a degree from a US-based institution).

This finding strongly suggests that Mainers with foreign credentials struggle to have their experience and skills recognized in Maine, with the result that they are forced to work in jobs for which they are overqualified.

The broader recognition of foreign licenses and credentials proposed by LD 149 would not address all the employment problems for New Mainers. Racial discrimination is also a significant problem in this area. But being able to put their experience to best use would clearly help New Mainers. MECEP estimates that if New Mainers who were college graduates were able to find employment commensurate with their education, it would result in 800 people earning \$47 million a year in additional income.

Recognizing professional certifications and licenses would add to this number. However, those benefits aren't limited to the Mainers who would see improved job prospects. Employers benefit from a larger pool of skilled workers from which to hire. And those higher earnings get spent in the local economy, producing a ripple effect that benefits all Mainers.

LD 149 is a common-sense approach to occupational licensing and credentialing. Rather than making New Mainers undergo repetitive examinations or study material they already know, we should recognize the prior skills and experience they bring to our state. Doing so will not only allow them to thrive in their new home state but strengthen Maine's economy for all of us.

I urge you to support this legislation. As always, if you have any questions please feel free to reach out to me at jmyall@mecep.org.

Notes

¹ Myall, James, "State of Working Maine 2020: Building a More Equitable Maine Would Help Working Families and Strengthen the Economy." *Maine Center for Economic Policy*. November 12, 2020. <https://www.mecep.org/maines-economy/report-state-of-working-maine-2020/>