



Church World Service Opposes LD 1131 & LD 612, Urges Lawmakers to Pass LD 149, An Act To Facilitate Licensure for Credentialed Individuals from Other Jurisdictions

As a 75-year old humanitarian organization representing 37 Protestant, Anglican, and Orthodox communions and 24 refugee resettlement offices across 17 states, Church World Service (CWS) writes in opposition to LD 1131 and LD 612, which do nothing to support the barriers faced by foreign educated individuals. Instead, CWS endorses [LD 149, An Act To Facilitate Licensure for Credentialed Individuals from Other Jurisdictions](#), which would strengthen immigrant and refugee integration in Maine and help them continue to thrive.

LD 149 would provide discretion to the Office of Professional and Occupational Regulation to facilitate refugee and immigrant workforce and allow new Americans to better utilize their professional credentials earned outside the United States. We are a country with a proud legacy of refugees who helped found this nation, and we recognize the valuable contributions they [bring to Maine](#) communities and the economy. This legislation seeks to further that legacy and engender our core values of generosity, hospitality, and welcome.

Maine has long recognized that refugees are vital to the continuing prosperity of our communities – they pay taxes, help grow our economy, and bring unique skill sets, experiences, and insights. In [2015 alone](#), nearly 6,000 refugees living in the state paid \$17 million in national, state, and local taxes, and held \$67 million in spending power. While the economic contributions of refugees are impressive, their incredible degree of upward mobility truly stands out. More broadly, immigrant populations and their workforce value has been of critical importance to the [future of Maine's economic development](#), particularly in a state that very recently had a poor population-growth outlook. This legislation would help foster that upward mobility and bring it to scale.

[Refugees and immigrants are beloved members of our communities](#) and vital to their prosperity. However, many immigrants and refugees remain unable to fully contribute their talents to the workforce because of systemic barriers, including the lack of recognition of their international education and experience, outdated occupational and professional re-credentialing processes, and insufficient access to meaningful workforce development and adult education services. Across the United States, [nearly 2 million immigrants with college degrees](#) are unemployed or stuck in low-skilled jobs, [including](#) as dishwashers, security guards, or taxi drivers, often because of difficulty getting their credentials recognized or other hurdles. This situation represents a waste of human capital affecting around 23% of college-educated immigrants and 18% of U.S.-born college graduates. The underutilization of immigrant and refugee talent has devastating effects on individuals, local communities, and Maine's economy.

Ensuring that immigrants and refugees reach their professional and educational goals in the U.S. is beneficial to our communities and the economy. Businesses struggling to fill gaps in their labor force will gain the talent necessary to [compete and grow](#); immigrants and their families will benefit from improved economic opportunities; and, ultimately, communities across the country and the overall economy will [benefit from increased consumer spending](#), fiscal contributions, and improved services. [Refugees are resilient](#) and are [serving on the frontlines](#) of the U.S. pandemic response, including as more than 176,000 healthcare workers and more than 175,000 workers in the food supply chain. However, refugees experience acute needs and certain disparities that threaten their health, well-being and success. As we recover and rebuild, the need to integrate talented refugees into the workforce is increasingly urgent.

It is critical for states to [reduce barriers](#) to occupational licensure by supporting the reviewing and updating of states' licensing processes to ensure that immigrants and refugees are not disproportionately affected. We encourage Maine to take the steps necessary for immigrant and refugee integration and inclusion to ensure opportunities for immigrants and refugees to contribute their professional skills and training. The economic health of the U.S. is dependent on the strength of its workforce, and immigrants and refugees are key to supporting our nation's recovery and ensuring its economic stability. We urge you to support LD 149, oppose LD 1131 and LD 612, and demonstrate moral leadership around the imperative to love our neighbor, welcome the immigrant, and care for the most vulnerable among us.