



March 23, 2021

### **LD 149 – An Act to Facilitate Licensure for Credentialed Individuals from Other Jurisdictions**

Senator Curry, Rep. Roberts and Members of the Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business my name is Sally Sutton. I am the Program Coordinator of the New Mainers Resource Center at Portland Adult Education and I am pleased to be speaking in support of LD 149. In my role as Program Coordinator I have an opportunity on a daily basis to work with foreign trained professionals who are seeking to re-start their lives and careers here in Maine and licensing is one of the most challenging aspects of a foreign trained professional's entry into the US workforce.

Maine's foreign trained professionals have much to offer toward the economic growth of our state. In 2018/19 school calendar year, 76% of those new Mainers we served in our program had a bachelor's degree or higher and the background of these professionals cuts across all sectors.

As part of my work I have had the opportunity to work with hundreds of individuals, conduct research and participate and benefit from national and multi-state initiatives that are also working to address issues of licensure for foreign trained professionals. The challenges people face are significant. What we have found is that:

- Individuals who are living in Maine and licensed to practice in another country are not able to achieve licensing in Maine
- There is misinformation and/or a lack of understanding of how the licensure process works
- Inability to access college transcripts, diplomas and in some cases course descriptions or syllabi can prevent moving forward with licensure
- Being able to afford the costs of licensure – which can be many thousands of dollars – is prohibitive when someone is here as a refugee or asylum seeker starting their lives over
- Meeting English proficiency requirements can be a big barrier at different levels
- Being able to fulfill and/or document work experience requirements
- Meeting any additional education requirements with limited access to financial aid; or entry into an educational program as a non-matriculated student
- Immigration status can impact licensure for some professions

- Lack of recognition of the value of foreign degrees by schools and employers

I am speaking in support of LD 149 as a good step forward to address some of these issues. It is based on the efforts and recommendations of a working group, established by this committee, of which we had an opportunity to participate.

Maine faces serious workforce shortages, particularly among many of its licensed professions as many people retire and age out of the workforce. Maine's immigrant population, particularly those who are coming with college degrees and professional experience, provides a tremendous resource to the state that could help Maine address its workforce needs. Given this pool of experienced trained professionals it is well worth the attention and effort necessary to try to address the different barriers and challenges they face with licensing and help facilitate their entry into Maine's workforce at the fullest extent possible.

Licensure of foreign trained professionals is a challenge for most states. If Maine can make some positive steps forward in this area, such as passage LD 149, we as a state could attract more skilled professionals who move to Maine because they would know that their skills and experience were valued here and that they would have an opportunity to put their training to work to support themselves and their families.

Thank you for your consideration of my comments in support of LD 149. Passage of this legislation would be a very positive step forward for the State of Maine and I urge you to vote Ought to Pass on this bill.

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