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of Commerce

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**Testimony in Support of LD 787-An Act to Create the New Maine Resident Service Coordination
Program in the Department of Economic and Community Development**

Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement, and Business
March 20, 2023

Senator Curry, Representative Roberts and members of the IDEA Committee,

My name is Eamonn Dundon, and I am the Director of Advocacy of the Portland Regional Chamber of Commerce. We represent 1,300 businesses in our region who employ over 65,000 Mainers. We are submitting this written testimony today to express our organization's strongest support for LD 787.

We have a tremendous and acute challenge in Maine, providing services through overwhelmed municipalities and charitable organizations to the thousands of New Mainers that have arrived here in the last few years due to the pandemic and failures in federal immigration policy. We also have an unimaginable opportunity to stem demographic declines and grow the economic pie for all Mainers. To match that problem with that solution, we need increased support from the state in the form of coordination of service delivery, housing placement, and workforce development among these populations.

Last week we hosted our monthly Eggs & Issues breakfast on the topic of welcoming New Mainers into the workforce¹. The panel, which included Danielle West from the City of Portland, Tim Matheney from South Portland Public Schools, Mufalo Chitam from the Maine Immigrants Rights Coalition, and Luke Holden from Luke's Lobster, described to us the enormous burden that has been placed on our municipalities, school districts, and service providers who are having to address failures of a national scale at a local level. All of them were unanimous in their support for welcoming these communities to our state, but they were similarly united in their frustration with a lack of state and federal systems to support their good work. For instance, we heard that the average family that has been sheltered in a hotel over the last few years has cost over \$14,000 in public assistance monthly. This type of support is unsustainable.

Luckily, we have a solution. New Mainers want nothing more than to bring their professional and life experiences to bear in Maine's workforce, but as you well know they are prevented from doing so due to a misguided and uninformed federal law that handcuffs our ability to grow our workforce and a severe lack of housing. DECD is well positioned to lend their long-standing expertise in economic and workforce development and their newer capabilities in housing policy to coordinate action on the state level to meet these needs.

We participate in several local solutions that have emerged in recent years to meet the workforce and business development needs at a local level, but there is only so much individual municipalities and organizations like ours can do without coordinated support from the state and federal government. Our Portland Professional Connections program² matches foreign trained professionals with Maine professionals in their industry to give them exposure to professional networks in Maine, connections to

¹ Recording of the event: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JosI-XE4zG4&ab_channel=PortlandRegionalChamberofCommerce

² <https://www.portlandofopportunity.com/ppc>



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navigate the barriers of establishing appropriate education and credentials for that specific industry, and hopefully a job that matches their experience with the ever-growing needs of our workforce. I also participate as a board member on the Portland

Development Corporation, which has in recent years run a micro-loan/grant program that has seen tremendous uptake in New Mainer communities as these individuals get established here and look to put their entrepreneurial skills to use building small business that contribute our local economy, build economic security, inject vitality in our city, and employ individuals in rewarding jobs. These programs are great examples of things that can be accomplished with relatively little public dollars with a high return on investment, but again there is no ability to scale them without that state coordination and support.

We thank you for your time and commitment to all Mainers, and we ask for your expeditious approval of this important legislation.