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**Testimony of Beth Stickney, Esq.,**  
**In Support of LD 1169, An Act to Amend the Laws Governing the Foreign**  
**Credentialing and Skills Recognition Revolving Loan Program**  
April 4, 2023

Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, and members of the joint standing committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business, good afternoon. My name is Beth Stickney. I am from Portland, and am the former founding Executive Director of the Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project, and later of the Maine Business Immigration Coalition, and have been working with immigrants and with their employers in Maine for decades.

I urge you to support LD 1169.

Maine's shrinking labor force means that every new working-age resident who moves to Maine, whether from across the country or around the globe, is someone Maine needs to join our workforce in a way that maximizes his/her potential and contributions to our economy.

Unfortunately, federal immigration laws prevent many of Maine's immigrants, chiefly asylum seekers, but also others such as spouses of U.S. citizens, from receiving work authorization for extended periods, even as long as a year, after filing their applications to stay permanently in the U.S.

I was a champion of the original loan program administered by FAME. The idea was to allow individuals forced to be unemployed by federal policy, to at least be able to use that time productively by creating a way for them to pay for "work-readiness" expenses that cost money. Money that they do not have, given that they cannot legally work and earn an income. The loan program is designed to help these immigrants pay the costs to get their driver's or their foreign credentials translated and evaluated, etc. – preparatory steps to help them get into jobs more commensurate with their skills, and/or jobs that pay more but can't be reached by bus.

But as a loan program, immigrants can't control or be sure of when they'll receive their work permits and begin earning an income, and have been understandably reticent to take on debt just when they are trying to launch their lives in the U.S. And service providers who work with them have told me that they haven't even informed qualified immigrants that the loan exists, due to fears of saddling these

individuals with a damaged credit rating right from the outset of their lives here.

LD 1169, by turning this into a grant program, solves this problem. And in turn, the bill aligns with Maine's [Economic Development Strategy 2020-2029](#) Action B4 to "Help New Americans and Other Newcomers Get Qualified to Work in Maine" and with [The Maine Jobs & Recovery Plan](#)'s goal to "Expand and Strengthen Maine's Workforce."

LD 1169 also slightly increases the maximum amount an individual can request to help with these expenses from \$700 to \$1000. Costs of translations and evaluation services have risen since the loan program was first created, and this is a reasonable increase.

In sum, LD 1169, is a small, but strategic investment in human capital, helping immigrants who already call Maine their home to get into the best jobs that they can once they get their work permits. Maine will be amply repaid through their improved ability to support their families, through the higher taxes they'll pay by getting into better jobs, through increased consumption, and through their contributions as community members who appreciate that when they needed a hand up, Maine offered one.

I urge you to vote "ought to pass" on LD 1169.

Thank you.

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immigrants who choose to make Maine their new home have increased possibilities of learning about career pathways and of honing their skills to contribute to their fullest extent and to the fullest benefit of Maine's economy. This will enhance their ability to contribute to the State as workers, and ultimately as taxpayers and consumers.

LD 1467 ought to pass. Thank you for your consideration.

Very truly yours, o  
Beth Stickney, Esq.<sup>1</sup>

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