

April 4, 2023

LD 1169 – An Act to Amend the Laws Governing the Foreign Credentialing and Skills Recognition Revolving Loan Program



Senator Curry, Rep. Roberts, 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 1169 – An Act to Amend the Laws Governing the Foreign Credentialing and Skills Recognition Revolving Loan Program. 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 here in Maine, and each year I advise several hundred people about the steps they need to take to move forward with their careers.

When people first contact me for an appointment the primary reason they give for meeting is that they want help doing an equivalency of their degree, i.e. how does their degree from their country compare to a degree in the United States. Helping people to understand when, how and where to have an evaluation of their degree done is a complicated and costly process and is an integral part of the advising we provide to new Mainers. Depending on why they want an evaluation done, whether for employment, school or licensing the answers to those questions, and costs, can be different. The costs related to an evaluation of a degree include not just the cost of the application for the evaluation, which for some could be over \$500, but also the translation of a person's transcripts and diplomas, which averages about \$50/page, and can get very expensive depending on how many years someone has gone to school.

I have been in my position with NMRC since 2013 and in all those years there has not been a steady source of funding for credential evaluations. Each year we have had to look for funds. To the extent possible, we try to build these costs into the program costs covered by some grants. For example, if we happen to have a grant related to healthcare one year, then maybe we can cover the costs of evaluations for some health professionals. We get limited support from small non-profits such as Scholarship for Maine Immigrants, or Friends of Portland Adult Education that is not restricted, and we have been very grateful for that support, but it is not enough. If a person falls outside of the funding we have available at that particular time; we are not able to provide services for them. Also always having to keep these limitations in mind, we are hesitant

to promote our program and these services very widely as we would not be able to meet the demand. In recent years, we have been receiving more referrals from the CareerCenters, other adult education programs, and both USM and SMCC to help cover the costs of credential evaluations for the people that are receiving their services or planning to attend school. This is also an indication of the need for a much broader and consistent funding support for these services that is available statewide.

I have been very appreciative of the intent behind the establishment of the Revolving Loan Program and FAME's efforts to try to meet this need. However, I could not in good conscious refer people, who were still struggling to meet basic needs, to a loan program.

I am very pleased to be speaking in support of LD 1169, which would not only turn the Revolving Loan Program into a grant but also increase the amount from \$700 to \$1000, which would help ensure that most people would have the full cost of their translations and evaluations covered.

I want to thank Representative Cloutier for introducing LD 1169 as well as the cosponsors of the bill for their support of this important initiative. The New Mainers Resource Center also looks forward to working with FAME and our partners on making sure eligible new Mainers are aware of this program and understand how take advantage of what will be a very important resource. I urge this committee to vote Ought to Pass. Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.

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