



**Testimony of Joby Thoyalil, Maine Business Immigration Coalition  
In Support of LD 1169, An Act to Amend the Laws Governing the Foreign  
Credentialing and Skills Recognition Revolving Loan Program**

April 4, 2023

Good afternoon Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, and members of the joint standing committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business. My name is Joby Thoyalil and I am testifying on behalf of the Maine Business Immigration Coalition (MeBIC) in support of LD 1169.

MeBIC is Maine's only resource dedicated to providing information, education and advocacy on immigration and related issues from the business and economic perspective.

Maine, like so many parts of the country, is experiencing a short- and long-term workforce shortage and there has been a growing consensus for years that immigrants are an important part of the solution. That's why in 2019, the Legislature established the Foreign Credentialing and Skills Recognition Revolving Loan Program, which is designed to provide interest-free loans to immigrants to help them get ready to take the best, highest paying jobs they are qualified for once they receive their work permits. Specifically, the program was designed to help recipients take practical steps toward getting "work-ready." For example, to apply for a job that requires a master's degree, immigrants often need to have their foreign educational credentials translated if not in English, and then evaluated by a professional service to establish that their education is the equivalent of a U.S. master's degree. This can cost hundreds of dollars. Costs not unique to immigrant job applicants may also be covered, such as the need to pay fingerprinting fees for background checks to work in public schools, or for a driver's license to be able to drive either to, or for, one's job.

MeBIC supported the creation of the loan program in 2019 because we strongly believe that Maine needs all working age adults living here to be able to work to their highest potential. We especially saw the need for this for immigrants who must wait many months to a year to receive work authorization from the federal government, which is the case for people seeking asylum. Asylum seekers could spend that time taking steps to get ready for work, but those steps cost money and without being able to work, they are caught in a Catch-22.

We were dismayed to learn that the loan program isn't being utilized, but we understand people's hesitance to take out any kind of loan when they don't yet have a job or know what their income will be - no matter how low-cost the loan may be. That is why we very much support this bill to turn the loan into a grant and we see it as a practical fix to the program. We believe this would alleviate people's apprehension, increase uptake, and help achieve the original goals of the program, of having more Maine residents able to work at their highest potential, which would clearly benefit those individuals and their families, as well as Maine businesses and the economy as a whole.

I will note that two MeBIC allies, Jon Stein of Fogtown Brewing, a Maine microbrewery with restaurants in Maine and Bar Harbor, and Ed McKersie, Founder and President of ProSearch, a job recruiting hub specializing in high tech and other professional positions, both were unable to testify today but wanted me to convey their support for this bill. Maine's labor shortages at all skill levels require the State to be as creative as possible to help people get to work at their highest potential.

In conclusion, recall that in 2021, nearly 100 Maine businesses, chambers of commerce, trade associations, and higher education institutions signed the Maine Compact on Immigration<sup>1</sup> urging state leaders to "adopt policies and practices to help Maine become a destination of choice for immigrants to the U.S. and that provide an environment where immigrants can reach their full potential in our state." LD 1169 clearly represents such a policy. For this and all the reasons previously mentioned, I urge you to vote "ought to pass."

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.mecomcompact.org/>