

Testimony from Tobin Williamson of the Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition regarding:  
**LD 2164: An Act to Establish the Maine-Ireland Trade Commission and Improve  
Collaboration with Ireland**

Sponsored By: Senator Trey Stewart of Aroostook County

Dear Sen. Curry, Rep. Roberts, and Members of the Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement, and Business:

My name is Tobin Williamson and I am the Manager of Advocacy & Policy with the Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition (MIRC), a network of around 100 member organizations working to enhance the lives of Maine's immigrant communities across the state. MIRC works to advance systemic changes in Maine through collaborative advocacy to ensure that voices and perspectives of the state's large, diverse, and growing immigrant communities are heard at the State House in Augusta, in the Halls of Congress in D.C., and in municipalities throughout Maine.

I am writing to you in support of LD 2164. For centuries, people of Irish heritage have been making the move to the land we now call Maine. Indeed, my own in-laws made the transatlantic voyage from Ireland to New England in the 1800s, as did tens of thousands of other people<sup>1</sup>. The integration of Irish people into Maine took some time<sup>2</sup> and they did not always have the best relations with existing residents in the state<sup>3</sup>, but over the generations, they became an essential part of our Maine culture, a model for newer immigrant communities in the state today.

Yet this relationship is not just something that is relegated to the dustbin of history. The proud legacy of the impact of Irish-Americans in the state continues even today. In meetings with members of Maine's Congressional Delegation, the Irish Ambassador to the U.S. praised Maine's "great Irish community"<sup>4</sup> last October and cited "the strong connections between Ireland and Maine"<sup>5</sup> last July. I have been to multiple events at the Maine Irish Heritage Center<sup>6</sup> in Portland. In sport, the Maine Mariners<sup>7</sup> hockey team and Portland Sea Dogs<sup>8</sup> baseball team both have Irish-themed nights, and the basketball team, well, they are literally named the Maine Celtics<sup>9</sup>. And within the past year, Maine has seen visits from the Vice Consul General of Ireland to New England<sup>10</sup> and a leader of the Irish Senate<sup>11</sup>.

LD 2164 would cement the relationship between Maine and Ireland even stronger by establishing a Maine-Ireland Trade Commission to promote cooperation in the realm of bilateral trade and investment, policy, academic exchanges, and other issues. From MIRC's perspective, we were particularly encouraged to see that members of the Commission will include "two members representing Irish-American communities, organizations, or interests," highlighting the importance of immigrant inclusion.

We hope that you will vote to pass LD 2164. Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.newscentermaine.com/article/life/heartwarming/fourth-generation-irish-american-bride-says-i-do-in-the-same-spot-relatives-tied-the-knot-100-years-ago/97-02823618-8b71-4b98-85b7-e870d2023f0d>

<sup>2</sup> <https://mainemill.org/learn/immigration/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.pressherald.com/2020/07/06/on-this-date-in-maine-history-july-6/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://twitter.com/IrelandAmbUSA/status/1714769117423554788>

<sup>5</sup> <https://twitter.com/IrelandAmbUSA/status/1678551241675231234>

<sup>6</sup> <https://maineirish.com/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.marinersofmaine.com/games/2024/03/15/world-record-nightirish-heritage-night>

<sup>8</sup> <https://maineirish.com/irish-night-at-the-portland-sea-dogs/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cnMEeyK09VU>

<sup>10</sup> <https://wgme.com/news/local/vice-consul-general-of-ireland-celebrates-maines-irish-heritage-with-portland-visit>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.gorhamtimes.com/legislative-leaders-welcome-sen-daly-of-ireland/>