



Maine Equal Justice

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MEJ Testimony *Opposing* LD 1318, An Act to Enhance Data Collection Requirements Related to Immigration Status and Asylum Seekers to Safeguard Services for Legal Residents

April 7, 2025

Good afternoon, Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Dina Malual, I use she/her pronouns, and I am a Policy Advocate with Maine Equal Justice (MEJ), a nonprofit legal aid provider working to increase economic security, opportunity, and equity for people in Maine. We are *opposing* LD 1318, An Act to Enhance Data Collection Requirements Related to Immigration Status and Asylum Seekers to Safeguard Services for Legal Residents

Maine Equal Justice was supportive of the creation of the Office of New Americans and actively participated in listening sessions held by the Governor's Office of Policy Innovation and Future (GOPIF). We maintain that the office has the opportunity to support Maine's growing immigrant community in a positive way that increases our workforce, and in the long-term, we believe it could assist in identifying ways to remove barriers to education and work experienced by immigrant communities and coordinate efforts across state agencies to support improved access to government programs and services through better language access and a recognition of the cultural differences that can impact access for some immigrants. .

LD 1318 would require ONA to collect and analyze data on the immigration status of individuals served or supported by the activities of ONA to determine outcomes for individuals seeking asylum, including the status and resolution of asylum claims in order to interpret trends and support service delivery. While we understand and recognize the need for data to inform policy decisions, we have concerns around the privacy and use of this specific data.

Data is important in determining policy solutions and improving equity across state government and the education and work sectors. For example, people seeking asylum have specific barriers to employment that differ from other immigration statuses due to federal law requiring the former to wait 180 days after they've filed for asylum to apply for work authorization. However, that data does not need to be collected on an individual level - nor does ONA have the expertise and capacity to monitor individual immigration cases and statuses.

In today's climate, it's also fair to assume that there are privacy concerns about how data collected about individual immigrants may be shared with and used by the federal government. Unfortunately, we have recently seen the current federal Administration incorrectly detain and deport immigrants of varying statuses - sometimes in ways that put individuals at risk of torture and even death. It is simply unsafe to collect data about individual immigrants when not required

under current law. Again, we believe ONA can play a critical role in collecting and analyzing data across whole populations of immigrants, but it should not be doing this at an individual level.

We look forward to working with you to ensure that immigrants in Maine have full access to the workforce and ways to improve access to other services that can support immigrants in becoming a vital part of our communities . We are deeply committed to supporting Maine's growing immigrant population and look forward to working with the Office of New Americans. Thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts with you today.