

Testimony in Support of LD 1971, “An Act to Protect Workers in This State by Clarifying the Relationship of State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies with Federal Immigration Authorities”

James Myall, Senior Policy Analyst

May 19, 2025

Good Afternoon, Senator Carney, Representative Kuhn, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Judiciary. My name is James Myall and I am a Senior Policy Analyst at the Maine Center for Economic Policy. I’m here to testify in support of LD 1971, “An Act to Protect Workers in This State by Clarifying the Relationship of State and Local Law Enforcement Agencies with Federal Immigration Authorities” MECEP supports LD 1971 because it would prevent local and state officials from collaborating with unjust federal policies that harm New Mainers and our economy more broadly.

Now more than ever, New Mainers of all immigration statuses are living in a state of anxiety due to the actions of the federal government. Whether someone is here on a tourism visa,¹ work visa,² or even as a naturalized citizen,³ appears to offer little protection from questioning or detention by Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE). In addition to the damage it is causing these individuals and their families, it’s directly harming Maine’s colleges⁴ and our tourism industry.⁵ With serious questions being raised about the constitutionality of the actions by the administration, now is no time for Mainers to be abetting these activities.

LD 1971 prevents local resources from being diverted to enforce federal policy priorities. When local law enforcement workers with ICE to detain immigrants, it detracts from their core purpose of making local communities safe. These agreements do not reduce crime,⁶ and in fact predominantly target immigrants for minor infractions.⁷ By making immigrants afraid to interact with local police, it also reduces reporting of crimes that these law enforcement officers *should* be investigating. Studies have shown this is particularly true for domestic violence against Latina women.⁸ As a result, cities that adopted so-called “sanctuary” policies had *lower* crime rates and saved billions compared to those that actively cooperated with ICE.⁹

Immigrants, including those who are undocumented, are a key part of Maine’s communities and its economy,¹⁰ and should be welcomed, rather than scapegoated. Yet when local officials work with federal immigration agencies, immigrants, especially lawful immigrants with college degrees, are more likely to choose to live elsewhere.¹¹ Enhanced

immigration enforcement also hurts the agriculture¹² and construction sectors,¹³ making essentials like food and housing more expensive for everyone. If we want to attract and retain the workforce that Maine needs, we need laws like LD 1971 to protect New Mainers.

The old assumption that immigration depresses wages or deprives native-born Americans of jobs is outdated. Instead, many economists now agree that immigrants act as a complement to American labor, boosting the economy with their contributions and creating additional demand rather than creating over-supply.¹⁴ As a result, policies like those in LD 1971 which protect immigrants actually reduce unemployment and increase incomes in the local jurisdictions where they are enacted.¹⁵

LD 1971 helps to clarify the roles of different government officials. It does not stop ICE or other federal agencies from doing their jobs, but it does prevent them from wasting local and state taxpayer resources on activities that may be unconstitutional and are certainly unproductive. It ensures that local and state officials can ask for immigration information where it is pertinent – such as applying for safety net programs which require a certain immigration status – but prevents them from asking for that information when it is unnecessary. In doing so, LD 1971 will protect our tax dollars as well as our friends and neighbors, and it will Make Maine’s economy stronger.

Thank you for your attention. I urge you to vote “ought to pass” on the legislation, and I’m happy to take any questions.

Notes

¹ Maria Cassidy and Gavin Thomas, “Detained Welsh tourist tells of experience in US.” *BBC News* Apr 18, 2025. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cqj4w91vz7jo>

² Jasmine Mooney, “I’m the Canadian who was detained by Ice for two weeks. It felt like I had been kidnapped.” *The Guardian* Mar 19, 2025. <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2025/mar/19/canadian-detained-us-immigration-jasmine-mooney>

³ William Skipworth, “A German-American from Nashua has been jailed for more than a month. It’s still unclear why.” *New Hampshire Bulletin* Apr 15, 2025. <https://newhampshirebulletin.com/2025/04/15/a-german-american-from-nashua-has-been-jailed-for-more-than-a-month-its-still-unclear-why/>

⁴ Paula Brewer, “Crossing the border is getting harder for Canadian students at Maine colleges” *The County*, May 15, 2025. <https://thecounty.me/2025/05/15/education/crossing-the-border-is-getting-harder-for-canadian-students-at-maine-colleges/>

⁵ Eric Russell, “Maine sees steep drop in Canadian visitors crossing border” *Portland Press Herald* May 13, 2025. <https://www.pressherald.com/2025/05/13/maine-sees-steep-drop-in-canadian-visitors-crossing-border/>

⁶ Joel A Capellan and Evan T Sorg, “Do Local-Federal Immigration Enforcement Agreements Reduce Crime? A Nationwide Evaluation of the Crime Reduction Benefits of Section 287(g) of the United States Immigration

and Nationality Act.” *National Criminal Justice Reference Service*. Nov 2022.

<https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/305488.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/research/delegation-and-divergence-287g-state-and-local-immigration-enforcement>

⁸ Randy Capps, Marc R. Rosenblum, Muzaffar Chishti and Cristina Rodríguez, “Delegation and Divergence: 287(g) State and Local Immigration Enforcement,” *Migration Policy Institute* Jan 2011.

<https://www.iza.org/publications/dp/12868/can-sanctuary-polices-reduce-domestic-violence>

⁹ Dale T. Manning and Jesse Burkhardt, “The local effects of federal law enforcement policies: Evidence from sanctuary jurisdictions and crime” *Contemporary Economic Policy* 30 June 2021. Available at

<https://www.congress.gov/118/meeting/house/116200/documents/HHRG-118-JU01-20230713-SD004.pdf>

¹⁰ James Myall, “7 things to know about immigration in Maine and the United States,” *Maine Center for Economic Policy*, Oct 29, 2024. <https://www.mecp.org/blog/7-things-to-know-about-immigration-in-maine-and-the-united-states/>

¹¹ Tara Watson, “Enforcement and Immigrant Location Choice,” *Federal Reserve Bank of Boston Working Paper* 13-10. 22 Oct 2014. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2512416

¹² Jennifer Ifft and Margaret Jodlowski, “Is ICE freezing US agriculture? Farm-level adjustment to increased local immigration enforcement,” *Labor Economics* Vol 78 Oct 2022.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S092753712200094X>

¹³ Troup Howard, Mengqi Wang, and Dayin Zhang, “Cracking Down, Pricing Up: Housing Supply in the Wake of Mass Deportation.” *Social Scholars Research Network*. 7 Nov 2024.

https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4729511

¹⁴ Chloe N. East , Annie Laurie Hines, Philip Luck, Hani Mansour, and Andrea Velásquez, “The Labor Market Effects of Immigration Enforcement,” April 19, 2022.

https://www.chloeneast.com/uploads/8/9/9/7/8997263/ehlmv_draft.pdf

¹⁵ Alexander D. Nathanson, “Economic Impacts of Sanctuary and ICE Policies Inclusive and Exclusive Institutions.” June 2022. https://appliedecon.oregonstate.edu/sites/agscid7/files/applied-economics/economic_impacts_of_sanctuary_and_ice_policies.pdf