

TESTIMONY OF MUFALO CHITAM SUPPORTING LD 473
An Act to Create the Maine Rental Assistance and Voucher Guarantee Program
Labor and Housing committee
Wednesday, March 3, 2021 10:00 AM, Cross Building, Room 202
Sponsor: Representative Victoria Morales

Good Morning Representative Mike Sylvester and Senator Joe Rafferty!

I am here to testify in **SUPPORT of LD473** on behalf of the board and members of the [Maine Immigrants' Rights Coalition](#) (MIRC) a coalition with a commitment to advancing and defending the rights of immigrants. Our mission is to improve the legal, social and economic conditions experienced by Maine's immigrants – enhancing their lives while strengthening Maine – through advocacy, information sharing and collaboration both through and among our member organizations.

MIRC now has a new capacity that we didn't have before. Over the years, we have grown significantly to 73 member organizations. This has created an enormous opportunity for a larger leadership role on policy issues relevant to immigrants and in the coordination of Maine's diverse immigrant communities on initiatives that will advance integration.

We actively prioritize the voices, perspectives, and decision-making of New Mainer communities as we acknowledge the status quo of systems that consistently disadvantage them. We believe in the power of New Mainers to make Maine a better place for all who live here and so envision policies that will not exacerbate inequities across BIPOC groups, including divisions across the country of origin, socioeconomic status, state geography, language, and immigration status.

Maine has seen a growth of Immigrants in the last 10 years but lacks Infrastructure to support their economic and social integration. LD 473 will help fill the gap and bridge households until they can move to other federal programs.

Role of Housing

- A safe, affordable Housing is a basic human need
- It can lower stress and bolster Health
- Enabling children to perform better in school
- Support Adults in retaining jobs and neighbors to feel connected and safe

Challenges

- Lack of voucher and housing assistance
- Even once a family gets federal rental assistance, they often struggle to find housing that will accept the voucher.

Housing navigation is a proven, effective tool that helps those experiencing homelessness to get housing!!

Host Home Program For Asylum Seeker Summer & Fall 2019

In the summer of 2019, an unprecedented number of asylum-seekers arrived from the Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola to Portland Maine. Over 450 people arrived and were sheltered temporarily in the Portland Expo. In a unique community coordinated response, local organizations created a hosting program to temporarily place asylees with local host families.

MIRC led a partnership of ethnic organizations and with Greater Portland Council of Government (GPCOG) and CIEE, to help facilitate safe, temporary housing arrangements with asylum-seeking families and Greater Portland hosts and helped support host families. Housing navigators from our ethnic organizations were instrumental in finding and securing long-term housing for all 43 families involved.

“This impromptu hosting program successfully met the temporary housing needs of many asylum seekers who came to Portland, Maine in summer, 2019. Faced with this imminent need for housing in municipalities that were already

experiencing housing shortages and inadequacies of the larger social service system, MIRC and its community partners managed to create an effective hosting program in a matter of weeks. Inevitably there were organizational challenges.

Hosts recommended future programs employ more case management and cultural brokers, and to set clearer expectations/responsibilities of hosts, guests, and providers. They also recommended a comprehensive resource guide, and more face-to-face meetings between providers, hosts, and guests.

This study confirms that hosting programs can harness people's collective motivation and resourcefulness to meet a community's dire need. Hosting programs are a novel solution for supporting asylum seekers transitions into American life, ease burdens on emergency shelters and social services, and can provide an avenue for hosts and asylum seekers to form a lasting connection."

Housing Navigation is Crucial to help Households find and keep safe housing!!

In a continuous way, post-Expo COVID19 era an additional 400 hundred plus asylum-seekers have since arrived in the Greater Portland area, once again putting a lot of pressure on the city, and the many nonprofits who reach out to find housing, among other things. Affordable Housing will help Maine Immigrants become financially stable and as a result help build Maine's economy and so, we urge this committee not to pass this bill.

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References

(Research Paper: *Providing Refuge in a Time of Need; A Phenomenological Study of Hosting Asylum Seekers in Maine*, USA Jordan D. H. Zema, Eric R. Lutz, and Rachel C. Casey School of Social Work, University of Southern Maine - July 2020)

MIRC MEMBERS

ACLU of Maine
 African Women and Development
 Angolan Community Association of Maine
 Aspire For Humanity Initiatives
 Baha'i Community and Organic Change
 Burundi Community Association of Maine
 Cambodian Community Association of Maine
 Capital Area New Mainers Project
 CCM - Refugee and Immigration Services
 Coastal Enterprises, Inc (CEI)
 Choose Yourself
 City of Portland - Minority Health Program
 Congolese Brazzaville Community of Maine
 Congolese Community of Maine
 Congregation Bet Ha'am - Tikkun Olam Council
 Cross Cultural Consulting Group
 Cumberland Legal Aid Clinic, Refugee and Human Rights
 Djibouti Community and Volunteer Services
 Empower Immigrant Women(EIW)
 First Parish UU Church
 Frannie Peabody Center
 Furniture Friends
 Gateway Community Services Maine
 Greater Portland Family Promise
 Hispanic Ministry - Portland Diocese
 Hope Acts
 Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project
 Immigrant Resource Center Of Maine
 IN HER PRESENCE
 Iraqi Community Association of Maine
 Jewish Action Maine
 Ladder to the Moon Network
 Latinx Family Wellness & Recreation
 Light Mission Church
 Mahoro Maine Association
 Maine Access Immigrant Network (MAIN)
 Maine Business Immigration Coalition
 Maine Citizens for Clean Elections - LWV
 Maine Community Integration
 Maine Council of Churches
 Maine Equal Justice Partners
 Maine Immigrant & Refugee Services
 Maine Mobile Health Program
 Maine People's Alliance
 Maine Unitarian Universalist State Advocacy
 Maine Women's Lobby
 Mano en Mano / Hand in Hand
 NAACP
 Network & Scholarships for Maine Immigrants Org
 New England Djibouti Community
 New Mainer Tenants Association
 New Mainers PAC
 New Mainers Resource Center-Portland Adult Ed.
 Office of Maine Refugee Services-CCM
 Portland Friends Meeting
 Preble Street
 Presente!ME
 Prosperity Maine
 Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland
 Rwandese Community Association of Maine
 Somali Bantu Community Association
 Somali Community Center of Maine
 South Sudanese Community Association of Maine
 Southern Maine Community College
 Southern Maine Workers Center
 Sudanese Roots
 Unified Asian Communities
 Welcoming Immigrants Network (WIN) of Greater Portland
 Welcoming Immigrants, Our New Neighbors