



Testimony in Support of LD 1050: “Resolve, Directing the Department of Labor to Request a Federal Waiver to Allow Presumptive Work Eligibility for Asylum Seekers”

Senator Tipping, Representative Roeder, and the distinguished members of the Committee on Labor and Housing, my name is Nick Murray and I serve as director of policy for Maine Policy Institute. We are a free market think tank, a nonpartisan, non-profit organization that advocates for individual liberty and economic freedom in Maine. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on LD 1050.

We commend Sen. Brakey for sponsoring this bill, and we commend Chellie Pingree, Maine’s First District Representative to the US Congress, for sponsoring the Asylum Seeker Work Authorization Act at the federal level.¹ Both of these proposals seek to cure the same issue: many asylum-seekers are being housed in Maine, which requires massive local resources to accommodate, but these people must wait many months before they can legally earn a living.

Just last month, officials with the City of Portland warned they are facing a financial cliff dealing with the more-than-550 asylum-seekers who have arrived since the beginning of this year.²

Whether accomplished via a change to federal law or through LD 1050, this small policy change would pave a path for asylum seekers in Maine to land a job and support their families much sooner than they can today.

This would relieve pressure on the state’s labor market, injecting hundreds, if not thousands, more workers into Maine’s workforce to fill positions in crucial industries which have gone unfilled for multiple years. This would help stabilize costs for employers, allow some businesses to plan for the future, and provide asylee families with income to support themselves and their communities while they attempt to get settled in their new homes.

Please deem LD 1050 “Ought To Pass” and provide a pathway for New Mainers who want to work and support their families. Current rules are nonsensical, so this Legislature should do all that it can to correct them. Thank you for your time and consideration.

¹ <https://pingree.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=4501>

²

<https://www.mainepublic.org/business-and-economy/2023-02-28/portland-officials-warn-the-city-is-facing-a-cliff-as-it-struggles-to-house-asylum-seekers>