

Testimony of the Metro Regional Coalition In Support of
LD 2167, *An Act to Develop Maine's Economy and Strengthen Its Workforce by Establishing an Office of
New Americans*
January 30, 2024

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government, my name is Michael Foley. I am honored to serve as the Mayor of Westbrook and the Chair of the Metro Regional Coalition (MRC).

The MRC is a longstanding collaboration between the cities of Portland, South Portland, and Westbrook, and the towns of Cape Elizabeth, Falmouth, Gorham, and Scarborough, staffed by the Greater Portland Council of Governments. The MRC focuses its work on issues impacting Greater Portland, using municipal and regional partnerships wherever possible.

The MRC has prioritized issues surrounding housing and homelessness for many years, including work to support newly arriving asylum seekers. We thank the Governor for her Executive Order proposing an Office of New Americans, and we welcome LD 2167 implementing Governor Mills' Executive Order.

This Fall MRC members outlined several recommendations regarding the ONA that go somewhat beyond the scope and duties of the new Office contained in LD 2167. We share them now for your consideration as you finalize the work of the new Office:

- ONA should take an active role in establishing more transitional housing across the state and use transitional housing as a central element in cultural and economic integration through education offerings before work permits are granted, and as training centers for those who are ready to work.
- ONA should lead state policy changes that move support for new Mainers away from municipal General Assistance and into a more holistic state managed approach.
- ONA should work with the legislature in 2024 to establish a statewide system to track General Assistance across municipalities.
- ONA should address the need for more municipal workers by connecting new Mainers with training and education which positions them for municipal work when they are ready and able.

Thank you for the opportunity to share the MRC's views on ONA priorities. We are very encouraged by LD 2167 and the work it will do to welcome new Americans to our communities. Please let me know if we can be of further assistance as you complete your important work on this bill.