



Maine Education Association

Grace Leavitt President | Jesse Hargrove Vice President | Beth French Treasurer
Rebecca Cole NEA Director | Rachelle Bristol Executive Director

Testimony In Support of

LD 2167 An Act to Develop Maine's Economy and Strengthen Its Workforce by Establishing an Office of New Americans

Grace Leavitt, President, Maine Education Association
Before the Joint Standing Committee on State and Local Government
January 30, 2024

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and members of the State and Local Government Committee,

My name is Grace Leavitt. My pronouns are she, her, hers. I am serving as President of the Maine Education Association while on leave from teaching Spanish in MSAD 51. I have over 43 years of classroom teaching experience with 20 years as a National Board Certified teacher. The MEA represents nearly 24,000 educators in our Maine system of public education in pre-K-12 schools as well as in our institutions of higher education, both the University of Maine System and the Maine Community College System, along with students in teacher prep programs as well as many retired educators.

I am submitting this testimony on behalf of MEA in support of LD 2167, An Act to Develop Maine's Economy and Strengthen Its Workforce by Establishing an Office of New Americans.

As the number of New Americans in our state has been increasing, so has the number of diverse students in our public schools. Our educators have been working hard to meet their needs and of course will continue to do all they can. MEA believes that an Office of New Americans as described in this legislation will be extremely helpful in providing more support for both these students and the educators who work with them. This Office will also go a long way towards providing a variety of supports for the families of students which is so essential to the students' ultimate success.

In addition, the Office of New Americans can also help with the shortages in the educator workforce that we have only seen continue to worsen over the past several years. By providing guidance and assistance in such things as licensure, not only will this potentially help address some of the vacancies we continue to see across the state, but this will also help to diversify the educator workforce—something we know will greatly benefit all of our students.

We have one suggestion for the legislation as proposed. We suggest that the membership of the advisory council for the Office include not only a representative of a school administrative unit but also one or more teachers who work in schools where there is a greater percentage of diversity among the student population so that there are practitioners who are directly involved in educating young new Americans. We would further recommend that these teachers be appointed from a list of nominees presented by MEA as the largest organization in the state representing educators. This would help ensure that an important perspective is included in the work of the advisory council.

We urge your support of LD 2167. Thank you for your time, and I am glad to try to answer any questions.

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