

Dear Honorable Members of the State and Local Government Committee,

I am writing to express my support for the Office of New Americans. This Office is much needed for our great state. As a human resources professional for over 35 years, I have been involved in workforce development for much of my career, starting with the federally operated Penobscot Job Corps Center in Bangor, along with being a part of the team that helped bring the Loring Job Corps Center to Limestone. I have worked in healthcare in both Maine and Oregon, where I witnessed the continual need for more staff to fill constant vacancies in hospitals, nursing homes, clinics, and recovery centers. In addition, I have worked for Maine's largest municipality – the City of Portland – where the need for police officers, fire fighters, healthcare workers, social service workers, public works and parks and recreation workers continue to be a concern of the highest priority.

There is no doubt that Maine needs more qualified workers to fill the many, many job openings that exist today.

I personally know these women, who's names I will not include for protection of their privacy.

1. A woman who was an attorney in Africa, who now works three jobs in the greater Portland area as she plans to open her own business. She has four children; two are college age and studying to enter the medical field.
2. A woman who was a nurse in Africa for 20 years, who now volunteers for a local non-profit serving Asylum Seekers while she waits for her work permit and takes English lessons at Portland Adult Education.
3. A woman from Africa who has a degree in forest management and environmental protection, and a master's degree in literacy who is waiting for her work permit and taking classes at Portland Adult Education.
4. A woman from Africa who is a student at USM and is part of a cohort of students just starting a C.N.A. training program at a nursing home.

These four women are among the most exceptional, brilliant, caring, hard-working women I have ever had the privilege of knowing. All of them have one thing in common: they came here to Maine with the desire to work and support themselves and their families.

The workforce challenges that Maine faces can be solved in large part by connecting more effectively and efficiently with the growing population of New Americans who have come here for a better life. There is a great opportunity in front of us: to gather data about who is here; to coordinate efforts of the non-profits who are working so hard on a grass-roots level to address both the immediate and long-term needs of this population; to inject the much needed intensive English language learning support that will enable so many with professional knowledge, skills, and abilities to jump into and fill all the many vacancies we have throughout the state; and to engage with the learning now made available for us as we expand our capacity to be more culturally inclusive and welcoming in our workplaces.

Lastly, I would encourage and recommend that the Office of New Americans listen attentively and be informed by the organizations that are already working with this population, specifically the Maine Immigrants' Rights Organization under the direction of the most important women/leader of Immigrants' rights in Maine – Mufalo Chitham; the Greater Portland Immigrant Welcome Center; the

Cities of Portland, South Portland, Westbrook, and the Town of Brunswick, among others which I'm not as well aware of, but I'm sure you will be hearing from.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony.

Sincerely,

Gina Ranzoni Tapp

242 Spurwink Ave.

Cape Elizabeth, ME 04107