

January 30, 2024

Written Testimony of Katie Rutherford, Executive Director of Frannie Peabody Center
**In Support of LD 2167, An Act to Develop Maine's Economy and Strengthen Its Workforce by
Establishing an Office of New Americans**
Committee on State and Local Government

Senator Nangle, Representative Stover, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Katie Rutherford and I am the Executive Director of Frannie Peabody Center. I am writing in support of LD 2167 to Develop Maine's Economy and Strengthen its Workforce by Establishing an Office of New Americans.

Frannie Peabody Center is the state's largest community-based HIV/AIDS organization providing both direct services to those living with HIV/AIDS as well as free HIV testing and prevention navigation. As a social services agency that assists individuals living with HIV/AIDS in Maine regardless of immigration status, we see the value and impact that financial independence has on the strength and health of our communities. We recognize the complex barriers faced by New Americans that require attention and leadership to ensure our communities have equitable opportunity and are set on a path to success and prosperity.

Immigration has been a vital component of Maine's history and provides an opportunity for continued growth and development. So many of our New Mainer neighbors are already contributing to the economy through Maine's workforce, but the pathway to achieve sustained stability is bogged down by unnecessary roadblocks that hinder progress. New Americans bring a wealth of talent and experience that – with appropriate resources and collaboration – can contribute to a diverse and highly skilled workforce.

The Office of New Americans will effectively achieve its goal of a strong and inclusive economy by assessing and addressing barriers and opportunities, cultivating collaboration among diverse agencies, stakeholders, and businesses, ensuring diverse voices and perspectives from those with lived experience, and using data-driven efforts to improve and implement strategies. This Office will be a tangible force for positive change for all Mainers; empowering Maine's communities and moving forward together. We applaud this bipartisan effort and wholeheartedly support the continued work of our partners and community members in making sure Maine is a place where all people have an opportunity to succeed and contribute to our vibrant state.

I urge you to support LD 2167 and continue to build on Maine's strength and commitment to *the way life should be*.