

1/29/24

We are submitting testimony in support of LD 2167 and HP1387. We are members of Portland Friends Meeting (Quaker) which is a member of the Maine Immigrant Rights Coalition (MIRC) and we are actively supporting Immigrant Families in Portland through Greater Portland Family Promise.

LD 2167 represents a over due and necessary shift of advocating and supporting immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers into their communities from the local municipalities to a coordinated statewide resource. The bill aims to improve the economic and civic integration of immigrants into the Sate's workforce and communities and will coordinate key aspects of this support including workforce opportunities, language learning, legal services collaboration with stakeholders and importantly adds data collection.

Immigration is an essential part of Maine's future. Immigrants fuel the growth in workforce and economic energy. Immigrants have always been important to the vitality of Maine and this office will proactively build on that tradition. During the past few years, we have all seen instances of local communities being overwhelmed with the arrival of asylum seekers and refugees and struggle to respond with the local resources. Families have not known where to turn when the need was desperate, and communities have not had a state partner to help when services were flooded. Establishing the Office of New Americans will be a tremendous resource to the network of resources which have developed in response and which MIRC has actively worked to support and develop into a more integrated system of support.

This bill will not only strengthen the welcome Maine extends to New Mainers, but also represents a commitment to building inclusive communities across that state that support and are strengthened by immigrants.

Sincerely

Fritz Weiss, Ann Dodd-Collins

Portland Maine