

Miyabi "Abbie" Yamamoto
Portland Adult Education
LD 2167

Dear Members of the State and Local Government Committee:

I am providing written testimony in favor of establishing LD 2167, An Act to Develop Maine's Economy and Strengthen Its Workforce by Establishing an Office of New Americans. I am here in my capacity as a foreign-born resident of Maine and as the executive director of Portland Adult Education, an organization that has provided workforce pathways to immigrants since its founding in 1848. I believe that establishing this office will increase transparency and clarity for all Mainers on how to welcome New Americans like myself with integrity into Maine's Workforce.

In particular, I would like to offer that the English language acquisition and workforce training— areas that we have provided pioneering work—is at capacity. At PAE, we enroll 2000 ESOL and Workforce students a year, but still have over 600 people on our waiting list each term. We believe that additional coordination and support from the Office of New Americans would help in increasing our capacity and facilitating state-wide coordination.

I would like to speak specifically on the two points of English language acquisition and Workforce training.

First:

English language acquisition is not just about language, but equal parts about acquiring systems knowledge and cultural knowledge; making this explicit is about increasing transparency for both immigrants, people from out of state, and youth who are new to the workforce.

This is related to the fact that not all immigrants are English language learners. As we have seen in this public hearing, even immigrants from English-speaking countries understand the necessity of acquiring American cultural and systems knowledge.

Second:

Workforce training

PAE has developed workforce training programs specifically for internationally-trained professionals and ESOL learners since 2007; and industry-specific trainings (e.g., English for Healthcare Professionals) since 2013. Recent funding via MDOL and MDOE have allowed us to greatly expand and deepen industry-focused training programs, designed for internationally-trained professionals in the fields of education, healthcare, banking, and renewable energy. These time-limited grants are set to expire in the next 1-2 years, and without sustained funding, the programs will not be able to continue.

We hope that the establishment of the ONA will create opportunities for stable funding which will support current and future workforce training programs to create a pipeline of highly-qualified immigrants to Maine employers.

This will ensure that Maine is fully utilizing the talented pool of internationally trained professionals living in our state and at the same time, will attract future talent.

I would like to conclude with urging you to vote in favor of this important and highly impactful legislation. Thank you for your time.