



**Testimony in Support of
LD 1685, An Act To Facilitate Entry of Immigrants into the Workforce
May 15, 2010**

Senator Herbig, Representative Daughtry, and Members of the Committee on
Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business,

My name is Beth Stickney. I'm a resident of Portland, and am testifying today in support of LD 1685 on behalf of MeBIC, a coalition of Maine businesses, chambers and associations dedicated to providing information, education and advocacy on immigration and related issues from and for the business and economic perspective.

As you well know, Maine has a growing labor shortage, and there's increasing consensus that immigrants are part of the solution.

Maine needs all working age adults living here to be able to work to their highest potential. However, foreign educated and experienced immigrants face practical barriers to doing so. For example, to apply for a job that requires a masters degree, they must have their foreign educational credentials translated if not in English, and then evaluated by a professional service to establish that their education is the equivalent of a U.S. masters degree. This can cost hundreds of dollars. Steps not unique to immigrant job applicants may also be barriers, such as the need to pay fingerprinting fees for background checks to work in public schools, or for a driver's license to be able to drive either to, or for, one's job.

Maine has many immigrants legally here who have filed for permanent status but must wait months to get authorization allowing them to work. For example, asylum seekers must by federal law wait 180 days after they apply for asylum before they can get their work permits. Many of them are highly educated and skilled. Data derived from the U.S. Census shows that as of 2017, more immigrants in Maine have graduate degrees than do our native-born citizens (21.3% compared to 11.7%), and they have bachelors degrees at virtually the same rate as native-born Mainers (19.4% compared to 20%).¹

The period when they legally can't work is the perfect time for them to take care of the prerequisites that will help them get into the best, highest paying jobs they are qualified for once they receive their work permits. But, they since they can't work, they have no income, can't access traditional loans, and can't pay the fees for their credentials evaluations, English language skills testing, or background checks, etc.

LD 1685 addresses this by offering these individuals funds administered through the Finance Authority of Maine to pay for specific expenses that will enhance their work readiness while they wait for their work permits.

¹ Migration Policy Institute <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/language/ME#>

LD 1685 is a targeted, effective, and practical solution to a discrete problem affecting a limited but important population.

It will enable these individuals, once they receive their work permits, to be able to better utilize their education and experience. This not only reduces “brain waste,” where individuals work far beneath their capabilities, but it also helps employers access talented, qualified people who might otherwise go work at MacDonalDs simply because they can’t yet prove their qualifications, and must buckle down to the business of earning money not just to live, but also to be able to get their foreign credentials evaluated in order to access more appropriate jobs.

Maine should help new immigrants become work ready while they wait for their work permits. Doing so will help them earn higher wages, pay higher taxes, and contribute to their families, communities, employers, and to our economy.

LD1685 will do just that, and enhance workforce development in Maine. I urge you to support it.

Thank you.