



February 19, 2019

Sen. Erin Herbig  
Rep. Matthea Larsen-Daughtry  
Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement and Business  
Cross Building, Room 202  
Augusta, ME 04333

Submitted via Email

**Re: LD 532, Resolve, Directing Professional Licensing and Certification Boards to Study the Barriers to Obtaining Professional Licensing and Certification.**

Dear Sen. Herbig, Rep. Daughtry, and Honorable Members of the Committee:

I am writing to urge your support of LD 532. I apologize that I am unable to attend the public hearing in person, and appreciate the opportunity to submit my testimony in writing.

MeBIC is Maine's only resource dedicated to providing information, education and advocacy on immigration and related issues from and for the business and economic perspective. As MeBIC's director, and as an immigration lawyer for more than thirty years, I keep abreast of issues relating to immigrants and immigrant integration both nationally and in Maine.

As you are well aware, Maine's labor supply is shrinking as baby boomers retire and as Maine's birthrates have fallen. Immigrants to Maine are key to our state's population growth and our ability to stem the state's workforce shrinkage.

Maine's immigrants 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 immigrants have bachelors degrees at virtually the same rate as native-born Mainers (19.4% compared to 20%).<sup>1</sup> Yet Maine's immigrants have high rates of so-called "brain waste", where they are underemployed, working at jobs that are far beneath their skill level. Estimates are that in 2017, nearly a quarter (24.2%) of Maine's foreign born population was underemployed.<sup>2</sup>

Barriers raised by opaque credentialing and professional licensing processes and inflexible requirements that prevent experienced and highly educated and/or skilled individuals who have followed a non-traditional path, such as foreign education and experience, from gaining licensure in their chosen careers harms not only these individuals. These barriers also harm Maine's employers who need these workers to be able to work at their highest potential.

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

<sup>2</sup> Migration Policy Institute <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/data/state-profiles/state/workforce/ME#>

They also harm native-born Mainers, who, for example, are suffering from a growing shortage of doctors, while doctors who were educated and worked for years abroad cannot work as physicians despite our need for more of them.

Furthermore, these barriers also directly harm Maine's economy as workers earn less than they could in their chosen professions, and pay less in tax revenues as a result. Maine's underemployed immigrants rate is similar to the national rate of 25%. Nationwide, this underutilization of talent results in over \$39 billion in foregone wages, and over \$10 billion in foregone taxes<sup>3</sup>, and Maine undoubtedly suffers a similar effect.

The credentialing and licensing barriers that foreign educated and experienced immigrants face are many. Some come from countries at war, where their universities were physically destroyed and the possibility of obtaining an official transcript of their studies, often required as part of the licensing process here, doesn't exist. Others may not be able to apply for licensure until they have had relevant experience in the U.S, but their foreign education may make U.S. employers reticent to hire them, creating a vicious cycle.

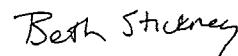
At the other end of the spectrum, some immigrants have many years of experience in fields such as cosmetology, but may have had little schooling in their home countries, so cannot apply for licensure where a high school degree is demanded. If an alternative pathway existed, such as the opportunity to take a practical, hands-on test, many could likely demonstrate their proficiency at doing nails and hair.

Maine needs to make a concerted effort to examine the licensing and credentialing process across a wide variety of fields to explore which requirements are protectionist and not actually necessary to prove competency in the profession, which requirements could be made more flexible to provide alternate pathways forward, and to make sure that requirements are described clearly and are readily accessible via the internet.

Maine's shrinking labor force means that every working-age resident who moves to Maine, whether from across the country or around the globe, is someone Maine needs to join the workforce in a way that maximizes his/her potential and contributions to our economy.

LD 532 is a good first step in that direction, and deserves the committee's support.

Sincerely,



Beth Stickney, Esq.  
Executive Director

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<sup>3</sup> Migration Policy Institute, New American Economy, WES: <https://www.migrationpolicy.org/content/what-cost-brain-waste-highly-skilled-immigrants-us>