



May 13, 2019

**Testimony of Julia Brown, Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project
In Support of LD 1475**

Good morning, Senator Carpenter, Representative Bailey, and distinguished members of the Committee on Judiciary. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of LD 1475.

My name is Julia Brown. I am the Advocacy and Outreach Attorney at the Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project (ILAP). ILAP is Maine's only statewide nonprofit provider of immigration law and related legal aid to Maine's low-income residents. Each year, ILAP serves over 3,000 individuals statewide, coming from approximately 100 countries around the world. On behalf of ILAP and our clients, I ask the Committee to vote "ought to pass" on LD 1475, otherwise known as "An Act To Eliminate Profiling in Maine."

Maine has a thriving and growing immigrant community. Over three percent of Mainers are immigrants, while 1 in 12 Maine residents is a native-born U.S. citizen with at least one immigrant parent.¹ Maine's immigrants come from countries such as: Somalia, Iraq, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, El Salvador, Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, and Cambodia, among many others. Most of ILAP's clients are people of color.

Many of our clients have reported interactions with police that they felt were based upon their race, national origin, or religion. Whether those interactions were based on racial profiling or not, this impression has led our clients to lose trust in police. Importantly, it is very difficult for members of the immigrant community to distinguish between law enforcement agencies. A perceived bias-based stop by Maine State Police impacts an immigrant's interactions with not just Maine State Police, but also Portland Police and any other uniformed official. The impact of

¹ *Immigrants in Maine*, AMERICAN IMMIGRATION COUNCIL, 2017, http://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/sites/default/files/research/immigrants_in_maine.pdf.

this lost trust is that many of Maine's immigrants will not contact law enforcement when they are victims of crimes, or come forward as witnesses. This impedes local and state law enforcement from being able to enforce Maine's criminal laws and consequently hurts Maine communities.

ILAP is very concerned about bias-based stops of immigrants of color. While incidents like the December 2017 Portland traffic stop of a van have made headlines,² clients tell us about traffic stops which often do not result in any citations at all. While we hear similar stories over and over, there is currently no mechanism to track this data. LD 1475 would put an end to our anecdotal cobbling together of evidence of bias-based profiling, and instead would create a clearinghouse of discrete data. This database would help all Mainers understand the scope of this issue and show law enforcement agencies and advocacy organizations the true extent of the problem.

LD 1475 also gives the Attorney General or injured individuals the ability to bring a civil action against the law enforcement officer or agency involved in an act of racial profiling. This will empower members of the immigrant community who have been injured by bias-based profiling to take action.

Even just a few instances of bias-based profiling by law enforcement have a detrimental effect on the relationship of Maine immigrants and people of color with all law enforcement. LD 1475 begins the difficult work of holding those few perpetrators of this profiling accountable and making Maine a safer place for everyone. I urge you to vote "ought to pass" on LD 1475. Thank you.

² Randy Billings, *Attorney Alleges Racial Profiling in Portland Immigration Stop*, PORTLAND PRESS HERALD, Dec. 21, 2017, available at <https://www.pressherald.com/2017/12/21/attorney-alleges-racial-profiling-in-portland-immigration-stop/>.