

Testimony Regarding  
LD 1317: An Act to Restore Services to Help Certain Noncitizens Meet Their Basic  
Needs

before the  
Health and Human Services Committee  
129<sup>th</sup> Maine State Legislature  
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presented by  
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Good morning Senator Gratwick, Representative Hymanson, and members of the health and human services committee, thank you for my time to testify. I am writing to state my support for LD 1317, An Act to Restore Services to Help Certain Noncitizens Meet Their Basic Needs. My name is Brooklin Jones. I am a University of Maine Master's of Social Work candidate and resident of Orono. I have a B.A. in International Studies. In my future practice, I hope to work with refugees, immigrants, and their families. I have done research projects on public laws regarding refugees and immigrants.

This bill removes limitations on food supplement program benefits and Temporary Assistance, such as SNAP and TANF, for immigrant, refugee, and asylum seeking families. Additionally, it would provide access to MaineCare coverage by altering the language for state-funded supplemental security income to maintain consistency throughout the law for refugees, immigrants, and asylum-seeking individuals, who are lawfully present in the United States or pursuing a lawful process to apply for immigration or refugee status (Maine Equal Justice Partners, 2019).

Under PL 96-212, The Refugee Act of 1980, enacted by congress in March 1980, refugees and immigrants are entitled to cash assistance, material goods, limited medical assistance, and other services (Refugee Act of 1980, 1980). The limited medical assistance is covered for their first year in the United States by the federal government (ibid). By restoring access to general assistance services and programs in Maine, lawful noncitizen individuals would be able to have services lawfully designated for them. Furthermore, under The Refugee Act of 1980, the cost incurred will be covered 100% by the federal government (Refugee Act of 1980, 1980).

Additionally under PL 95-113, The Food and Agriculture Act of 1977, PL 113-79, The Food and Nutrition Act of 2008, refugees, immigrants, and asylum seeking individuals are eligible SNAP and TANF benefits (The Food and Agriculture Act of 1977, 1977; The Food and Nutrition Act of 2008, 2008). Under PL 74-271, Social Security Act, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seeking individuals are eligible for social security, Medicaid, and Medicare benefits (Social Security Act, 1935). By passing this bill, individuals would be allowed access to benefits they are entitled to under federal law.

Currently 40% of Maine's food insecure population does not qualify for SNAP or TANF benefits and rely on food banks or charities to meet their needs. In the US, Maine ranks 18<sup>th</sup> in food insecurity with nearly 200,000 individuals lacking resources to meet a basic human need (Good Shepherd Food Bank & Feeding America, 2014). Recipients of these services will be better able to contribute to the community through employment and engagement according to Maslow's hierarchy when their physiological needs (food, water, shelter, sleep, etc.) and safety (security, health, finances, etc.) needs are being met. These needs quit being met in 2011 when it was stated immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers were a burden on these resources and as a result, previous legislators restricted these benefits and resources (Maine Equal Justice Partners, 2019; Besteman, 2016).

Despite being only 3% of Maine's population, immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers have contributed to 28% of new businesses in the US, seek higher level degrees, and join business boards (Dickstein, Dorrer, Love, & Chong, 2017). If refugees, immigrants, and asylum seekers are twice as likely to start a business, then I can only imagine what they would be able to do if their physiological needs are being met (ibid). I

implore you to think about the community engagement or philanthropic contributions that could be made from this group once their physiological and safety needs are being met. I implore you to consider the state slogan “the way life should be” when you are voting, as I want life to be better for all Mainers, citizen or noncitizen. I hope for a more productive and happier state with basic needs being met.

Thank you Senator Gratwick, Representative Hymanson, and members of the committee for your consideration and I hope you will support this bill so the needed assistance to refugees, immigrants, and asylum seeking individuals and families will be restored. I welcome any questions that you may have on this legislation.

## References

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- Good Shepherd Food Bank & Feeding America. (2014). *Hunger in Maine*. Retrieved from: [http://treeoflifepantry.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Hunger-in-Maine-Report\\_2014-final.pdf](http://treeoflifepantry.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Hunger-in-Maine-Report_2014-final.pdf)
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