



March 4, 2022

**Testimony of Susan Roche, Executive Director of the Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project
In Support of Proposed Amendment to LD 1999
An Act to Require Civil Rights Officers at Law Enforcement Agencies**

Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety:

My name is Susan Roche, and I am the Executive Director of the Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project (ILAP). ILAP is Maine's only comprehensive, state-wide immigration legal aid organization. Our mission is to help low-income immigrants improve their legal status and to advocate for more just and humane laws and policies impacting immigrants. Each year, ILAP serves over 3,000 individuals statewide, coming from approximately 100 countries around the world.

I submit this testimony in support of LD 1999 as amended, to explicitly ban racial profiling in Maine's laws. Racial profiling can not be tolerated in our state, and it is important to make this clear in our laws.

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

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

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 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.

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. Amended LD 1999 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 explicitly ban racial profiling in Maine's laws. 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/>.