



April 30, 2021

**Testimony of Julia Brown, Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project  
In Support of LD 967**

Senator Deschambault, Representative Warren, and distinguished members of the Criminal Justice and Public Safety Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in strong support of LD 967.

My name is Julia Brown, and I am the Advocacy and Outreach Director 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 967, otherwise known as "An Act To Make Possession of Scheduled Drugs for Personal Use a Civil Penalty."

Maine has a thriving and growing immigrant community. Four percent of Mainers are immigrants, while seven percent of Maine residents are native-born U.S. citizens with at least one immigrant parent. 94 percent of ILAP's clients are people of color and are subject to systemic racism as well as anti-immigrant rhetoric and policy. As immigration attorneys, we see the disparate impact of the criminal legal system on our clients.

Structural racism and white supremacy are a central part of our criminal laws and system, and thus our immigration enforcement system as well. As you will hear and have heard from many experts, drug laws target people of color, and in 2018 Black people made up approximately one percent of Maine's total population but accounted for five percent of all arrests and twelve percent of all prison sentences. This racial disparity extends to Black immigrants, who are more likely than other immigrants to be detained and deported due to an interaction with law enforcement.<sup>1</sup>

While many testifying today have described the terrible consequences of being arrested on a drug charge, noncitizens face those consequences plus far worse penalties. Drug offenses, even "minor" ones, have some of the most serious immigration consequences.<sup>2</sup> A noncitizen Mainer

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<sup>1</sup> NYU School of Law Immigrants Rights Clinic and Black Alliance for Just Immigration, *The State of Black Immigrants, Part II: Black Immigrants in the Mass Criminalization System*, <https://www.sccgov.org/sites/oir/Documents/sobi-deprt-blk-immig-crim-sys.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Drug Policy Alliance, *The Drug War and Mass Deportation*, Feb. 2016, [https://drugpolicy.org/sites/default/files/DPA%20Fact%20Sheet\\_The%20Drug%20War%20and%20Mass%20Deportation\\_%28Feb.%202016%29.pdf](https://drugpolicy.org/sites/default/files/DPA%20Fact%20Sheet_The%20Drug%20War%20and%20Mass%20Deportation_%28Feb.%202016%29.pdf)

arrested on a drug charge can be ripped from their home and family, deported, and barred from returning to the United States.

Passing LD 967 would spare many Mainers from deportation, keep families together, and be an important step toward ending the racially biased prison-to-deportation pipeline. I urge you to vote “ought to pass” on LD 967. Thank you for your time.