

May 20, 2022

Senator Susan Collins 413 Dirksen Senate Office Building Washington, DC 20510	Rep. Jared Golden 1222 Longworth HOB Washington, DC 20515	Lewiston Mayor Carl L. Sheline 27 Pine Street Lewiston, ME 04240
Senator Angus King 133 Hart Building Washington, DC 20510	Governor Janet Mills 1 State House Station Augusta, ME 04333	Bangor Council Chair Clare Davitt 73 Harlow Street Bangor, ME 04401
Rep. Chellie Pingree 2162 Rayburn House Office Building Washington, DC 20515	Portland Mayor Kate Snyder 389 Congress Street Portland, ME 04101	Augusta Mayor Mark O'Brien 16 Cony Street Augusta, ME 04330
South Portland Mayor Deqa A. Dhalac PO Box 9422 South Portland, ME 04106	Auburn Mayor Jason Levesque 60 Court Street Auburn, ME 04210	Westbrook Mayor Michael Foley 2 York Street Westbrook, ME 04092
Maine Municipal Association 60 Community Drive, Augusta, ME 04330	Greater Portland Council of Governments 970 Baxter Boulevard - Suite 201 Portland, ME 04103	

CC: Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas

**RE: URGENT RECOMMENDATIONS TO PROTECT NEWLY ARRIVED ASYLUM SEEKERS IN MAINE**

Dear Elected Officials of Maine,

The undersigned 80 organizations, with expertise in immigration services delivery and policy in Maine, write today to call on the State, as well Maine’s Congressional delegation and local elected officials, to take immediate action to guarantee housing and coordinated services for newly arriving asylum seekers. Together, we face a humanitarian crisis: families of asylum seekers are arriving weekly to Portland, and after the City announced on May 5 that it [can no longer guarantee shelter](#) or arrange services for them, these families face homelessness upon arrival to our state. As of May 16, we understand there are more than 35 families and 120 people in this dire and unacceptable situation. This is in addition to the 1,100+ individuals in families and hundreds of single individuals who had received shelter from the City before this new policy went into effect. A coordinated, state-wide effort is necessary to meet the moment.

Maine’s non-governmental organizations do not have the adequate resources, access, or authority to replace the government in providing coordinated aid to asylum seekers, nor should they. Asylum is a human right guaranteed by international and U.S. law, and it is the government’s responsibility to care for and protect people seeking asylum. As we call on you to take action, however, we reaffirm our commitment to welcome and to support you in this rapid response and in creating longer term infrastructure to provide asylum seekers with the tools and assistance needed to find stability and

security and start new lives. We believe in the values that the right to asylum upholds, and know that when we welcome asylum seekers, *we all benefit*. In Maine, a state in dire need of more workers and innovation, we know that this is acutely true and that those arriving in Maine could be our state's future workforce.

The situation unfolding in Maine, and the lack of resources available for the predominantly Black, African asylum seekers arriving in Maine, is also a crisis of equity. The United States' response in providing humanitarian protection and aid to people fleeing war and violence in Ukraine is the right course of action – and such measures must be extended to *all* people fleeing war and persecution. Accordingly, we submit the following urgent recommendations to provide equitable, coordinated care to our new neighbors:

### **State of Maine:**

Coordinated action is needed from the State of Maine most urgently and represents our highest priority recommendations.

#### ***Immediate/Short Term:***

- **Immediately open and staff emergency sites:** The state must immediately open emergency response sites in strategic locations to meet the needs of newly arriving individuals and families and provide shelter, food, and care for urgent medical needs. The state should coordinate with NGOs and community leaders who are standing by to provide as much support as possible.
- **Convene an Emergency Task Force to coordinate services to asylum seekers:** The State of Maine *must* be the central coordinator for newly arriving asylum seekers and the State must immediately set up a Task Force to work across government agencies and municipalities to respond to the situation at hand. The Task Force must 1) quickly identify and coordinate housing and other services, 2) identify and distribute additional state funding, 3) ensure resources are being distributed across municipalities and used effectively, and 4) serve as a central location to gather information and data for next steps. The Task Force must include NGOs serving asylum seekers and African, Black, and Latinx immigrant leaders to provide culturally competent advice.
- **Provide human and financial resources to Portland:** The State should deploy emergency management authorities, other available human resources, and funding to assist officials working on the humanitarian crisis taking place in the City of Portland and any other municipalities that are providing emergency housing through General Assistance or the Emergency Rental Assistance program.

#### ***Longer Term:***

- **Continue to seek federal funding and assistance:** The State should continue to seek FEMA funding and other resources from the federal government to provide housing and services.
- **Benchmark with other states:** The State should seek best practices and benchmark with other states to develop longer term plans, policies, and protocols to serve asylum seekers.

- **Facilitate flow-through funding to NGOs:** The State should flow through funding to organizations serving newly arrived asylum seekers, particularly immigrant-led organizations that can assist with culturally competent delivery of information and services.
- **Establish a permanent State office to assist in the resettlement of asylum seekers and other underserved populations in Maine:** To build long-term pathways to success, the State must create permanent, dedicated, infrastructure to coordinate services, address racism and disparate treatment, provide immigrant integration services, and take other measures to protect and uplift new asylum seekers, other immigrants, Latinx Mainers, Indigenous communities, Black and African American Mainers, and other underserved populations.

### City of Portland:

#### *Immediate/Short Term:*

- **Continue to provide housing and coordination of services:** We thank the City for its efforts so far but ceasing to provide coordinated services is not an acceptable course of action. The City must come up with emergency measures to protect asylum seekers from risk of homelessness, hunger, and additional suffering.

#### *Longer Term:*

- **Continue to coordinate with other municipalities, state, and federal government:** Portland should continue its efforts to coordinate with all levels of government as well as benchmark with other cities across the country welcoming asylum seekers to ensure resources are being maximized and innovative ideas used.

### Other Maine Municipalities:

#### *Immediate/Short Term:*

- **Engage with Portland:** Municipalities across the state should immediately reach out to the City of Portland to offer assistance with new arrivals and to coordinate asylum seekers coming to other municipalities in Maine.
- **Set up welcoming task forces:** Municipalities should convene task forces to plan for short-term services and assistance for asylum seekers. Task forces should include NGOs serving asylum seekers and African, Black, and Latinx immigrant leaders to provide culturally competent advice.
- **Request statewide coordination:** Municipalities should immediately reach out to the State to request and recommend statewide coordination of services for newly arriving asylum seekers.

#### *Longer Term:*

- **Build long-term infrastructure:** Municipalities should put in place permanent infrastructure as part of local government to ensure that they can respond to both ongoing and emerging needs and responsibilities.

## **Congressional Delegation:**

### ***Immediate/Short Term:***

- **Assist the State in securing federal funding and resources:** Maine's Congressional delegation must provide assistance to the State in securing federal resources to serve newly arriving asylum seekers.

### ***Longer Term:***

- **Vote against Title 42 restrictions:** Maine's Congressional delegation should vote to uphold U.S. asylum law and the values that underpin our system. Maine must set the example and lead in rejecting the politicization of human life and dehumanization of asylum seekers.
- **Support policies and legislation that would get asylum seekers work authorization faster:** Newly arriving asylum seekers in Maine are seeking security and stability, not charitable donations. Unfortunately, our federal immigration system does not operate in a way that allows people to immediately get work authorization to support themselves and their families. Notably, this potential new pool of workers could go a long way in addressing the state's workforce challenges. We urge Maine's Congressional delegation to pursue both legislative and administrative solutions including:
  - Calling on the administration to issue one-year humanitarian parole with simultaneous work authorization to all asylum seekers at the border.
  - Advancing legislation that would allow for asylum seekers to have work authorization sooner – we thank Senators Collins, King, and Representative Pingree for their efforts already to draft and introduce The Asylum Seekers Work Authorization Act of 2022 (H.R. 6693, S.3665).

Thank you for your consideration of these urgently-needed recommendations. Please contact Mufalo Chitam, Executive Director of the Maine Immigrant Rights Coalition (MIRC) at [mufaloc@maineimmigrantrights.org](mailto:mufaloc@maineimmigrantrights.org) for questions or to arrange a meeting. As much as our capacity allows, we stand willing and able to assist all levels of Maine government in greeting asylum seekers arriving in Maine with the care, compassion, and dignity they deserve. Together, let's show the nation that welcoming immigrants is not only lawful, moral, and just, but the path to creating stronger, more prosperous, more vibrant communities, and in turn, an even better Maine.

Sincerely,

ACLU of Maine

Afghan Community of Maine

African Women and Development

AILA NE Chapter

Al Badoo Community Association of Maine  
Angolan Community of Maine  
Aspire For Humanity Initiatives  
Baha'i Community and Organic Change  
Black Owned Maine  
Boundless Media  
Burundian Community Association of Maine (BCAM)  
Cambodian Community Association of Maine  
Capital Area New Mainers Project  
Choose Yourself  
Coastal Enterprises, Inc. (CEI)  
Congolesse Brazzaville Community of Maine  
Congolesse Community of Maine  
Congregation Bet Ha'am  
Cross Cultural Consulting Group  
Cumberland Legal Aid Clinic, Refugee and Human Rights  
Empower Immigrant Women (EIW)  
ETHICS (Empower The Immigrant Children & Students)  
First Parish UU Church  
Frannie Peabody Center  
Gateway Community Service  
Greater Portland Family Promise  
Hispanic Ministry - Portland Diocese  
Hope Acts  
Immigrant Legal Advocacy Project  
Immigrant Resource Center of Maine  
IN HER PRESENCE  
Iraqi Community Association of Maine  
Jewish Action Maine  
Ladder to the Moon Network  
Latinx Family Wellness & Recreation  
Light Mission Church  
Mahoro Maine Association  
Maine Access Immigrant Network (MAIN)

Maine Association for New Americans  
Maine Business Immigration Coalition  
Maine Citizens for Clean Elections - LWV  
Maine Community Integration  
Maine Council of Churches  
Maine Equal Justice  
Maine Immigrant & Refugee Services  
Maine Mobile Health Program  
Maine Multicultural Center  
Maine People's Alliance  
Maine Unitarian Universalist State Advocacy Network  
Maine Women's Lobby / Maine Women's Policy Center  
Mano en Mano / Hand in Hand  
NAACP  
National Partnership for New Americans  
Network & Scholarships for Maine Immigrants Org  
New England Djibouti Community  
New Mainer Tenants Association  
New Mainers Alliance  
New Mainers Alliance PAC  
New Mainers Resource Center - Portland Adult Education  
Office of Maine Refugee Services-CCM  
OneLove HomeCare, LLC  
Portland Empowered  
Portland Friends Meeting  
Preble Street  
Presente! Maine  
Prosperity Maine  
Roman Catholic Diocese of Portland  
Rwandese Community Association of Maine  
Somali Bantu Community Association  
Somali Community Center of Maine  
South Sudanese Community Association of Maine  
Southern Maine Workers Center

Unified Asian Communities

Welcoming Immigrant Neighbors - Bangor

Welcoming Immigrants Network

Welcoming Immigrants, Our New Neighbors

Welcoming the Stranger

YMCA of Southern Maine

YWCA Central Maine

#WelcomeWithDignity - National Campaign