

Testimony in Support of LD 1317 An Act to Restore Services to Help Certain Noncitizens Meet Their Basic Needs

Senator Gratwick, Representative Hymanson, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services, my name is Travis Kennedy, and I am the Director of Public Affairs for Cumberland County. I am a member of the Public Policy and Advocacy Committee for Thrive2027, and I am here today on behalf of Thrive2027 to lend our support to LD 1317, An Act to Restore Services to Help Certain Noncitizens Meet Their Basic Needs.

Thrive2027 is our community's commitment to make Cumberland County stronger for everyone who calls it home. Powered by the community and led by United Way of Greater Portland, 230 business, non-profit, public, and community organizations have endorsed three 10-year goals that promise measurable and meaningful change in Greater Portland. These three goals are to (1) give kids a strong start, (2) empower neighbors to thrive – not just survive, and (3) help us all live longer, better.

More specifically, these three goals are:

- Goal 1: More children have a strong start in school so that they are reading at grade level by the end of third grade.
- Goal 2: More people have the education and employment opportunities they need to be able to live and work in Greater Portland.
- Goal 3: More of our neighbors live longer, healthier lives.

Thrive2027 is not a new program – it is a new way of working. We have been convening players from across sectors, working to identify needs/gaps, and are in the early stages of aligning organizations and resources behind targeted solutions.

I can offer a little background. In 2015/16, our community came together because, despite our best efforts, improvements were not happening quickly enough or reaching as deeply or widely as we needed. Too many in Greater Portland were struggling. It was clear that we needed more people from all sectors at the table collaborating at a large scale to build a thriving community for us all. The result from community input, research, and best practices was Thrive2027.

In a nutshell, Thrive2027 serves as a blueprint to ensure all communities in Cumberland County thrive.

Thrive2027 does not replace the important programs and services in our community.

It makes them stronger by **integrating work so we can (1) identify needs and gaps, (2) maximize strengths and resources, and (3) develop and implement strategies that allow us to measure our progress.**

This work is overseen by a Council, a cross-sector group of individuals representing the work, creating on-going buy-in, and ensuring meaningful shared responsibility and ownership of Thrive2027. The Council is also supported by Goals Cabinets, which ensure the strategy

framework that will make the best progress on each of the goals is identified, adopted, and implemented.

At the heart of the work is our Goals Framework. This document identifies community approved strategies, along with metrics to measure progress, that represent the strongest collection of actions that could be undertaken, across multiple sectors, to make these three goals a reality. The Council and Cabinets evaluated several dozen strategies, using established criteria of reach, scale, success probability, community fit, and capacity to narrow them down to those ultimately approved.

One of the strategies in the Goals Framework is Strategy 2.21. This strategy is to Promote and ensure access to and availability of critical needs programs that lead individuals and families toward housing stabilization.

Our Council sees the clear alignment between our Goal 2 work, and this is why we are here today in support of LD 1317.

Ensuring that all members of our communities can access a strong safety net is key for lifting people out of poverty, jump-starting their employment success, and strengthening the state and local economy. A strong safety net, in short, helps people thrive, not just survive.

Such a safety net should be available for our foreign-born neighbors who lawfully reside in this State. We know that these immigrants make significant economic contributions to our communities. For example, they contribute significantly to state and local taxes, including property, sales, and excise taxes levied by state or municipal governments. In 2016, foreign-born residents in metro Portland contributed \$1.2 billion to the metro area's gross domestic product.¹ Approximately 24,546 foreign born individuals are currently employed in Maine; 4,396 of these working individuals are Portland residents, and a total of 9,737 working foreign born individuals live in Cumberland County.²

We also know, however, that the path to meaningful, sustained employment can be difficult. LD 1317 seeks to help bridge the temporary gap that may exist before securing such employment. By providing temporary, basic income supports for these lawfully present individuals and families, we help ensure these neighbors do not experience homelessness or extreme food insecurity. It is worth noting that even with these modest income supports, a household is still living in poverty. In Cumberland County, 85% of those living in poverty pay more than 30% of their income on housing.

On behalf of the overall effort that is Thrive2027, we respectfully encourage you to support LD 1317. LD 1317 ensures that those individuals and families seeking a better life in a new country have the support they need to contribute to our local economy as soon as possible.

Thank you for your leadership and service.

¹ http://www.newamericaneconomy.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/G4G_Portland.pdf

² *SELECTED CHARACTERISTICS OF THE NATIVE AND FOREIGN-BORN POPULATIONS, 2013-2017 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates*