

Written Testimony of Kathryn Vezina on Behalf of the Maine Unitarian Universalist State Advocacy Network (MUUSAN) To Committee on Innovation Development Economic Advancement and Business
In Favor of LD 149, An Act to Facilitate Licensure for Credentialed Individuals from Other Jurisdictions

Senator Curry, Representative Roberts, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Innovation, Development, Economic Advancement, and Business Committee, I am Kathryn Vezina and I bring to you today testimony in favor of LD 149, An Act to Facilitate Licensure for Credentialed Individuals from Other Jurisdictions, on behalf of the Maine Unitarian Universalist State Advocacy Network, also known as MUUSAN. MUUSAN is statewide advocacy and public policy network anchored in Unitarian Universalist faith and animated by UU principles. Unitarian Universalism calls us to change oppressive policies and structures to those that recognize the inherent worth and dignity of each person and build justice equity and compassion in human relations. We are speaking in support of LD 149 because it represents a step toward a more just society actualizing our UU principles.

LD 149 addresses a problem that is two-fold. First, as the state with the highest average age, many of our licensed professionals are retiring and the state needs even more qualified professionals to meet the needs of our aging population and to build and maintain a healthy economy. At the same time, there are many immigrants and refugees who have come to Maine and who are educated and experienced in various professions and are eager to work. Unfortunately, for many, professional licensing requirements present a major, sometimes nearly insurmountable, barrier to their ability to practice their profession here.

My background for nearly 40 years in Maine has been in healthcare. I am a Registered Nurse and a healthcare attorney and have worked with immigrants and refugees in Maine who have been educated and experienced in various healthcare professions including doctors, nurses, nurse midwives, pharmacists, lab technicians, and healthcare administrators. It is heartbreaking to realize that some of these professionals have deep knowledge and experience in areas where there are major needs in Maine, yet because of licensing barriers these professionals are working in positions such as Direct Support Professionals (an entry level position providing personal care assistance usually for individuals with intellectual disabilities or behavioral health conditions) or Medical Interpreters. While these roles are important, they do not allow these doctors/nurses/pharmacists/etc to meet their full potential. They often feel undervalued and unfulfilled, and Maine loses too. This does not recognize the inherent worth and dignity of every person—our first UU principle.

LD 149 is a positive step forward toward addressing this problem. It authorizes the Department of Professional and Financial Regulation to recognize the credentials of professionals from other jurisdictions and countries and to license these individuals on a case-by-case basis so long as the standards of professional proficiency are not reduced. Public safety is maintained and Maine gains the services of more needed professionals.

I have worked with several doctors and nurses with this challenge. One was a doctor practicing obstetrics and gynecology. Because of political unrest in his home country, he moved to another country nearby where he practiced and developed additional expertise in infectious disease diagnosis and management especially with HIV and multi-drug resistant TB. The political unrest in his home

country eventually endangered him in his new home, so he moved to the US. After years of trying to gain licensure as a physician in Maine and working other roles, he eventually left Maine and moved to Canada where he is now practicing medicine. Maine lost out there.

Because the Boards of Medicine, Osteopathic Medicine, and Nursing are independent boards and are not within the Department of Professional and Financial Regulation's control, LD149 will not directly address the licensing challenges faced by doctors and nurses. Still, there are many other professionals who are similarly affected and will benefit from the changes the LD 149 would implement.

On behalf of MUUSAN, we strongly urge a vote of Ought to Pas on LD 149, An Act to Facilitate Licensure for Credentialed Individuals from Other Jurisdictions. Thank you.