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*Testimony of Rep. Kristen Cloutier in support of*

## **LD 471, Resolve, to Establish a Pilot Program to Expand Intensive English Language Learner Programs**

*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs*

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. My name is Kristen Cloutier, and I represent House District 94, which includes part of my hometown of Lewiston. I am submitting this testimony in support of **LD 471, Resolve, to Establish a Pilot Program to Expand Intensive English Language Learner Programs**.

I want to start by thanking Senator Rafferty for sponsoring this critical legislation that addresses an urgent educational need in our state.

LD 471 establishes a two-year pilot program to expand intensive English language learner programs at both the University of Maine and the University of Southern Maine (USM). This initiative recognizes the growing diversity in our state and provides meaningful pathways for new Mainers to fully participate in our economy and communities.

The bill's comprehensive approach addresses multiple barriers to success:

- It provides essential stipends for child care, transportation and living expenses, recognizing that language acquisition requires financial stability.
- It funds two positions dedicated to helping students navigate and access Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits.
- It creates a sustainable pipeline of qualified educators by awarding full scholarships or tuition waivers for students pursuing USM's Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages online accelerated master's degree program.

Importantly, the bill includes a service commitment provision, requiring scholarship recipients to teach in Maine's intensive English language learner programs after completing their degrees. This ensures our investment creates lasting benefits throughout Maine's educational system. As Maine faces demographic challenges and workforce shortages, this legislation represents a forward-thinking approach that strengthens our educational infrastructure while supporting our

immigrant communities. Our state's future depends on fully integrating new Mainers into our workforce, and language acquisition is the essential first step in that process.

I urge the committee to support LD 471 and make this valuable investment in Maine's educational system and economic future.

Thank you for your consideration.