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Senator Rafferty
3 State House Station,
Augusta, Maine 04333

Feb 25, 2025

Dear Senator Rafferty,

I strongly support LD 471, An Act to Establish a Pilot Program to Expand Intensive English Language Learner Programs. This bill represents a crucial investment in Maine's workforce development, economic growth, and the vitality of our communities. Maine faces significant workforce shortages, particularly in critical sectors like healthcare, education, and skilled trades, and LD 471 offers a practical and effective solution. LD 471 directly addresses these workforce gaps by expanding intensive English language learner programs at the University of Maine and Southern Maine. This two-year pilot program will provide much-needed support to individuals seeking to contribute to Maine's economy.

Although the challenges vary based on individual circumstances, origin, and available resources, immigrants' ability to thrive in their new communities is affected significantly. The barriers are interconnected and impact their ability to integrate and be well. Immigrants face language, economic, social, cultural, legal, administrative, educational, health care, housing, and transportation barriers. Crucially, the bill includes stipends for childcare, transportation, and living expenses, removing significant barriers to participation for many potential students. Additionally, providing scholarships and tuition waivers for aspiring TESOL teachers will create a sustainable pipeline of qualified instructors, further strengthening our K-12 and higher education system.

The benefits of LD 471 extend beyond simply filling immediate workforce needs. Investing in English language acquisition is an investment in Maine's future. It strengthens our communities, enhances educational outcomes, and ensures that language does not hinder workforce participation and prosperity. As a TESOL (Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages) instructor in Maine, I've seen firsthand the transformative impact of these programs through my students' experiences. Here are some quotes from eight of my students.

J. shared that the program "helps us a lot since we are immigrants, and the first thing we must learn is the language. Without speaking English, it is difficult to get a job or even to ask for help." S. explained how the classes "help us to be prepared for any situation that we have to face with the language, it keeps us in constant learning and helps us to be adapted to the culture and customs of the United States." Y. noted that the program has "helped me a lot to improve my skills, making learning easier and more natural." M. expressed gratitude for the opportunity to study English, saying, "[my] lessons are very useful and interesting." O. emphasized the program's importance in helping immigrants "live better in the community" and feel more confident in daily life. R. described the program as "life-changing," giving her the confidence to communicate effectively and access better opportunities. M. expressed gratitude for the program and the patience of the instructors. Y. shared how the program has helped her learn English, a crucial skill in their new community. These are just a few examples of the real-world impact of these programs.

LD 471 is a strategic and fiscally responsible approach to addressing Maine's workforce challenges and promoting sustainable economic growth. I urge you to support LD 471 and help Maine build a stronger, more inclusive, and prosperous future. I appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely,

Nadine

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Gorham
LD 471

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