

Heather Cameron
Portland
LD 471
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Dear committee members,

I write to ask for your support of LD 471 to expand intensive English language learner programs in Maine.

We see the need amongst our clients at ProsperityME for more opportunities to learn English. Many people new to Maine have skills that are highly in demand especially in construction and healthcare yet the language barrier often presents a challenge for finding employment in their field. We hear of people on wait lists for 9 months to a year for programs and classes at local organizations and Adult Education programs while they study online.

For many years I volunteered as an ELL tutor at Portland Adult Ed. It was a small way for me to give back to the community after I returned from serving in the Peace Corps in West Africa. I remember how difficult it was to learn the local languages, Wolof and Hassaniya, and how patient people were with me as I tried to communicate. I met with over a dozen students at various levels of English proficiency for practice with reading, writing and sometimes just chatting about school, work and life. I remember one gentleman I tutored who had young twins. We arranged to meet at the library branch near their apartment to help them obtain a library card. The family sat in the children's section for almost an hour reading books to their toddlers who giggled and enjoyed the stories. Mom had been a nurse and the dad a coach and teacher. He proudly showed me a lengthy book he picked out for himself to practice reading in English about George H. W. Bush whom he knew had a home in Maine. They were excited to learn and share that joy of learning with their children. As we left, I waved goodbye to the parents pushing the big double stroller down the sidewalk with the twins still holding the books they had checked out from the library.

Our libraries, adult eds and local organizations are doing all they can and are at capacity. Please support additional resources for classes and scholarships to train new teachers. The return on this investment will be felt for generations to come.

Thank you,
Heather Cameron
Director of Programs
ProsperityME