

Emily Ingwersen  
Arundel  
LD 471

Dear Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and Honorable Committee Members,

My name is Emily Ingwersen, I own and operate Ginger Hill Design + Build, a residential construction company based in Arundel. I am writing to you today in support of LD 471 to expand intensive English language learner programs in Maine.

As a builder in Southern Maine for the past 15+ years I am keenly aware of the skilled workforce crisis we are facing. Finding people to work in the trades is becoming harder and harder and more and more costly. At a time when we face a housing shortage this is bad news for not only companies like mine, but for the future of housing in Maine. Growing up, my father was a builder and I followed in his footsteps, a practice that was once common but is becoming rarer. In order to address the workforce shortage, we absolutely need to recruit many more skilled workers, a gap that can't be filled by native Mainers alone. Over the past several years crews of Spanish and Portuguese speakers have become more prevalent in our area, which has helped to fill the shortage and get projects completed. This was not the case when our company opened its doors and I am not sure how our industry would be faring without these essential workers, who are becoming fewer and farther between. I myself have worked with roofing, framing and painting crews that speak only rudimentary English, which is extremely challenging for someone who only has high school Spanish under my belt. My company needs these workers and as I look ahead to the future, I only see that need increasing.

In my field, clear communication is necessary to ensure things go smoothly on a jobsite. A language barrier is difficult to navigate, particularly when discussing technical information. Many of the folks that I have worked with come from places that do not have the same building codes we have here in Maine and do not understand all of the minute requirements that are necessary. An example of this is a Spanish speaking framing crew that I worked with who had a very difficult time building an attic access hatch to specifications. An understanding of the why behind the what is incredibly important in my field, otherwise folks don't understand why something would be necessary and can tend to revert to previous methodology. Had these folks had English skills that improved our communication the hatch could have been built much more quickly and efficiently, and wouldn't have had to be redone several times. Not only can things go wrong with expectations and details, but the overall safety of the jobsite is of concern. Jobsites can be busy places with a lot of things happening at any one time, if folks are not able to clearly communicate with each other it can create a dangerous situation for everyone involved.

In order to continue to thrive my company needs more workers, almost everyone I work with is over 40 and younger workers are simply not available, a bad omen for the future of my field. We are beginning to see opportunities to expand our workforce and the piece that is missing is English fluency. This bill, should it be enacted, would help support the growth of a skilled workforce. There are people who have the technical skills that are required for construction but simply do not speak English, investing in their language skills would be an easy way to utilize their existing knowledge to fill a critical gap in our economy. Thank you for your consideration of supporting LD 471.

Sincerely,  
Emily Ingwersen  
Ginger Hill Design + Build