



To: Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

From: Elise Hartill, Maine Youth for Climate Justice

Date: Monday, March 3, 2025

RE: Testimony in support of L.D. 471: "A Resolve to Establish a Pilot Program to Expand Intensive English Language Learner Programs"

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Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and honorable committee members,

My name is Elise Hartill, and I am the Executive Director of Maine Youth for Climate Justice ([MYCJ](#)), a statewide coalition of more than 500 youth and young adults advocating for bold climate action and an equitable, sustainable future. I am writing in support of LD 471 "A Resolve to Establish a Pilot Program to Expand Intensive English Language Learner Programs" in Maine.

As a youth climate justice organization, our work exists at the intersection of environmental, economic, and social justice. Maine has a significant workforce shortage, especially in critical sectors such as healthcare, education and skilled trades. Such a program would help new Mainers integrate faster and gain the language skills necessary to work and earn in their communities, increasing tax revenue and financial independence while strengthening communities across the state.

Maine is faced with a multitude of crises, all relating to workforce shortages:

- [A recent study](#) found that Maine needs 84,300 new homes of all kinds by 2030 in order to meet our housing demands;
- Maine's solar and renewable energy industry is [projected to grow significantly](#) over the next decade, the industry is a significant job creator and a part of many municipalities' economic development plans;
- Maine is a [healthcare desert](#), our rural and aging population requires increased access to regular and specialized care;
- A [new study](#) on instructional times in schools found that Maine ranked in the bottom five states for school day length; last year Maine students had the lowest math and reading scores in decades...

New Mainers deserve the opportunity and dignity of work. Our state needs programs aimed at increasing our workforce and strengthening our communities. The climate crisis presents us with a multitude of challenges and opportunities, one of which is workforce development. An expanded Intensive English Language Learner program could be a part of the solution to our workforce shortage and community resilience.

For these reasons, the 500+ members of Maine Youth for Climate Justice respectfully encourage you to support L.D. 471. Thank you for your time and consideration of our testimony.

Sincerely,

Elise Hartill