

*Dear Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and Honorable Committee Members,*

03/03/2025

My name is Luis Dias, and I work as a grants accountant for the City of Lewiston. I am testifying today in support of LD 471 to expand intensive English language learner programs in Maine. When I arrived in the U.S. in 2018, I was highly motivated to learn English. Back in my home country of Angola, I was an accountant for a multinational corporation for a decade. I was eager to get back to my career as soon as possible here in my new home.

Back in 2018 when I arrived, there weren't such long waiting lists at Lewiston Adult Ed. I was able to study English there for an hour or two five days a week. After my time at Adult Ed, I entered a college transition program, and I went on to CMCC to study accounting and ultimately graduated from USM with a 3.8 GPA. In 2020, I started work at the City of Lewiston. Initially I was answering phones not putting my accounting skills to use. But my business math teacher at CMCC who also worked for the City of Lewiston learned of my accounting skills and proposed that the City hire me as a grants accountant and they did.

I wish when I immigrated to Maine, there had been a program like the one proposed in this bill. It's the perfect fit for highly motivated immigrants with skills Maine needs to fill critical gaps in the state's workforce. And now that there are long waitlists at Adult Ed across the state, many skilled workers may fall through the cracks and not be able to get back to their careers and contribute to the Maine economy the way I have been able to.

Another reason I believe this program will be a success is because it provides what is needed to attract and retain participants in the program. Without funds to cover living expenses, skilled workers might choose to stay in a low-paying jobs simply to have food to put on the table rather than enroll in a full-time intensive English program that will allow them to get back to their careers, increase their earnings, contribute more in revenue to the state, and no longer rely on public assistance.

Finally, as a city worker, I see worker shortages up close. Our public works department has frequent vacancies, including essential roles like plow drivers. Municipalities across Maine are dealing with significant worker shortages due to demographic trends like Maine being the oldest state.

With your support, Maine can expand access to UMaine's intensive English programs and unlock a hidden talent pool to strengthen our economy and achieve economic stability in the state.

Luis Dias,

Lewiston, ME