

Testimony in Support of Legislative Document No. 1705, An Act Regarding Adult Education Funding and Oversight

To the Honorable Members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

My name is Ersula Steward and I am an adult learner residing in Jay, Maine. I am writing today to wholeheartedly support Legislative Document No. 1705, "An Act Regarding Adult Education Funding and Oversight," because I have personally experienced the transformative power of adult education in our state.

After being a stay-at-home mother for twelve years with a GED under my belt, the prospect of college at age 36 felt overwhelming. However, my experience at RSU 73 Spruce Mountain Adult Education, specifically through their college transitions program, changed the trajectory of my life. The dedicated teachers, Betsy and Michelle, created a supportive and encouraging environment where I began to recognize my own potential and rediscovered a genuine love for learning. They instilled in me the confidence to pursue my goals, something I hadn't felt possible before.

The college transitions program equipped me with the skills and knowledge necessary to successfully apply and begin classes at Central Maine Community College. While I am still on my journey to completing my degree, the skills I gained through adult education have already had a significant impact on my life. I am currently working full-time, earning more money than I ever have, utilizing skills that have honed my knowledge and expertise.

My support for adult education extends beyond my personal success. I am now passionate about sharing my love for design and demonstrating that a non-traditional educational path is not only acceptable but can open up a world of possibilities. I had the privilege of speaking at the 2024 Maine Adult Education Association (MEAE) conference and recently returned from the 2025 Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE) National Conference, where I spoke about the critical importance of investing in marketing to reach more adult learners.

I firmly believe that by empowering adults, whether they are parents or not, we can create a ripple effect that enhances the next generation. If we invest in teaching and uplifting adults, we are directly contributing to a stronger future for our children and our communities.

This proposed funding is absolutely critical for individuals like myself – people who, for various reasons, have experienced a disruption in the "traditional pathway" of education. We are eager to learn, to improve our lives, and to contribute more meaningfully to our state. Adult education provides the essential support, encouragement, teaching, and opportunities that allow us to reach our full potential. Education, in all its forms, is paramount, and adult education serves a vital and often overlooked segment of our population.

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Legislative Document No. 1705, with its focus on sustained funding and the continuation of crucial programs like the Career Advancement and Navigation Program, is not just a piece of legislation; it is an investment in the human potential of Maine. It recognizes the value and the needs of adult learners and will undoubtedly create more success stories like mine.

I urge the Committee to recognize the profound impact of adult education and to give your full support to this vital legislation.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Ersula Steward

Jay, Maine Resident