

April 13, 2023

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and Members of the 131st Legislature's Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

My name is Jeremy Lehan. I am the Director of Adult Education in MSAD 54, which serves the Skowhegan area. This year I am also serving as President of the Maine Adult Education Association. **I am testifying in support of LD 1367.**

I am in my fourth year as the Director of Adult Education after 25 years as a high school English teacher. I have found working in adult education to be profoundly rewarding. Adult ed programs can have an immediate impact on a learner's life by helping them to earn a diploma, secure a workforce credential, or successfully transition to a post-secondary program.

Learners like Michelle Bowden, who was featured in the DOE newsletter about a year ago, benefit greatly from our services. Upon earning her diploma, Michelle secured a full-time job at Maine General with solid wages and benefits, after struggling for years as a single mom trying to make ends meet working as a PSS in home healthcare.

Local programs like mine work diligently to serve learners like Michelle. Yet in trying to juggle the varied needs of diploma students, Maine College and Career Access (MCCA) students, and workforce training candidates, we also confront the challenge of finding the funds to support staffing and other infrastructure.

As MAEA's Executive Director, Shirley Wright, outlined in her testimony, the state subsidy for adult education is driven by two factors: the previous year's subsidy and the local contribution.

When determining the local contribution, my superintendent carefully considers the school budget and its impacts on the average taxpayer because the communities of MSAD 54 face poverty greater than the state average. According to the latest Census data, the poverty rate in Somerset County is 18%, as compared to the State average of 11%.

For this reason, the local allocation for adult education in my district remained flat for over ten years.

Because our local allocation remained fixed, MSAD 54's state subsidy for adult education decreased by almost \$10,000 during that same period, while other nearby districts saw increases.

The other huge piece of the puzzle, however, is that **my district receives less than 50% of the subsidy we technically qualify for according to the state formula.** If the proposed \$1.5 million were added to the adult education subsidy, my program would get an increase of approximately \$18,000--which would be hugely helpful.

The increase proposed in LD 1367 will inject needed monies to help combat rising inflation, but, more importantly, the funds will allow us to expand our capacity to meet the need we know is there.

MSAD 54 Adult Education has only three full-time staff: a director, an administrative assistant, and one teacher. We also employ four other part-time teachers, and one part-time college/career advisor.

As a small, tightknit, largely part-time crew, we do our best to cobble things together for our students. I am proud to report that last year we served over 100 academic learners, awarding 27 diplomas, 58 workforce credentials, and aided over a dozen others in their transition to a post-secondary education. In addition, 248 other people participated in our enrichment programming.

All of that said, I know that the demand for services in our area is greater than we can meet. **In Somerset County, the high school graduation rate is 91% as compared to the state average of 94%. Unfortunately, our dropout rate is the highest of any Maine county.**

Even among those who have attained a diploma, there is a need for the educational support that adult education can provide. Using Census and other data, the Program of the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) tracks literacy and numeracy rates across the nation. On this scale, Somerset County has the lowest literacy and numeracy rates in the state, over 10 points below the state average and 2 points below the national average in each area.

Another huge issue in our county is that many school districts do not even provide adult education services or allocate any money to fund adult education locally. Schools like Carrabec in North Anson, Madison High School, and Valley High School in Bingham, disbanded their adult education programs years ago. Consequently, learners from all of those areas come to us.

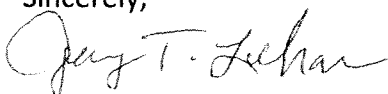
We have adapted as best we can by expanding remote learning options, but with increased funding and additional full-time staff, we could do more aggressive outreach and potentially create additional online and/or satellite learning opportunities for these learners.

In Somerset County the need is great and current resources do not meet the demand. I am grateful that we have been able to leverage grant funds to help support some programming; however, there are often limitations and restrictions on how some of these funds can be used.

I am hopeful that this committee and the legislature as a whole will recognize the key role adult education plays as a gateway to other opportunities; I hope that you will support a much needed increase in subsidy while simultaneously supporting an examination of whether the subsidy formula itself could be improved.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,



Jeremy Lehan

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