



## YORK ADULT EDUCATION

*Learn. Grow. Thrive*

February 21, 2024

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and Members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Education and Cultural Affairs:

I appreciate the privilege of addressing you today as a part of our long tradition of participatory governmental decision-making. As a representative of Maine Adult Education programs in York County, and a local adult education program director, I advocate for the inclusion of \$592,000 in the Department of Education's Adult Education budget, specifically to continue the Career Navigator positions, crucial for aiding adults in accessing targeted training for employment.

I bring testimony from participants in York County, on how the Navigator helped them.

An individual who was referred to the Navigator receives SSDI benefits and was interested in working. There are a lot of pervasive myths about a person's ability to work while receiving SSI or SSDI benefits. For example, other people in her life cautioned her that she would lose her benefits if she worked at all. She was offered an opportunity to work a few hours a week and was really interested in trying to work. The Navigator was able to meet with her, explain the realities of SSDI benefits and working. In conversation with the individual, the Navigator gave her the information she needed to make a decision about working. The individual expressed hope for her future for the first time in a long time. This individual is now working regularly and is helping her family to live more independently and with a better quality of life.

Another success was a participant who felt discouraged from applying for jobs because she wasn't getting any follow ups to her applications. The Navigator helped her write a resume and apply to several jobs in the same meeting. At a follow up meeting one week later, the participant shared that she had gotten one of the jobs and was then able to help her partner get a job with the same company. The partner's new position was a \$5 per hour raise over his previous position. Assuming 40 hours a week, over the course of a year, this represents more than a \$10,000 raise- a life changing amount for many families!

Finally, a participant who graduated from the Layman Way Recovery Center shared the following: "I just opened a checking/savings account and actually have some money saved up, it has been a very long time since I have been doing this well in my life and it feels amazing! ... I am so grateful for people like you, who believed in me and helped me gain the tools I needed to be successful."

While the overarching goal of career readiness is legislated at the national and state levels (WIOA), challenges lie in the administrative and technical capacities at the local level (Lerman, 2016, Kettl, 2022, Michener, 2018). The complexity of regulations, guidelines, and funding mechanisms poses significant obstacles for local communities responsible for equitable program implementation (Collins, et al., 2016, Collins & Bradley, 2022, Collins & Gerber, 2006, Collins & Gerber, 2008, Manna & Ryan, 2011, Mladenova, 2022, Moffitt, et al., 2021). **The Navigator positions have played a crucial role in bridging this capacity gap**, enabling adults to overcome barriers and access career-preparatory education. Recognizing this, *it becomes apparent that sustained support of the Navigator positions is crucial in building the local administrative and technical capacity by which the workforce preparation efforts can continue.*

In conclusion, I urge you to allocate an additional \$592,000 to the Department of Education's Adult Education budget in the Supplemental Budget, reinforcing the state's commitment to empowering adults for meaningful careers.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and dedication to our community's welfare and progress.

Sincerely,

Lisa Robertson

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