

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and distinguished members of the Committee On Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Nathan Davis, and I testify in favor of LD 471: Resolve to Establish a Pilot Program to Expand Intensive English Language Learner Programs.

I own a small business in Rockland and am a partner in several others, and through my work in software development have interacted professionally with many more businesses throughout Maine. I also serve on the Rockland City Council, though I speak today only on behalf of myself.

Folks who are fluent in English can get better jobs, be more productive here in Maine in the jobs they do get, and generally lead more prosperous and stable lives. Almost any employer in Maine is aware of our labor shortage, and almost any public servant in Maine is aware that there are no quick fixes for that labor shortage, which is going to persist despite all the considerable attention we devote to the issue. Every week in both my public service and professional careers, I encounter businesses that wish to expand their operations but are constrained by the labor market. Anything we can do to make a dent in the labor shortage is going to help all of us

I think it would be very tough to make a case against the idea that teaching immigrants English is good for Maine, at least in the abstract. But legitimate questions of cost attend this bill and would attend any such effort, and it's appropriate to ask if the potential costs are worth the potential benefits. Here's a way to think about the potential benefits: Anybody who can't make a living wage in Maine imposes costs on the state - costs of social services, subsidized housing, and related necessities - and thus on all of us. Very recent data is tough to come by, but we can take a 2005 study by two researchers at the US Census Bureau as a starting point. This study found that "on average, workers who spoke only English earned \$5,600 [per year] more than people who spoke another language. However, the differences in earnings between those who spoke English at the highest ability (very well) from English-only speakers was relatively small (\$966)."¹ This is an old study and not specific to Maine, but it can at least serve as a starting point for some back-of-the-envelope estimates. The study indicates that learning English to a high level could lead to earning roughly \$4,600 more per year (not accounting for inflation). L.D. 471 would provide instruction for up to 780 students, and assuming a working life of 30 years after the course of study and 90% employment among graduates, it could result in a net lifetime earnings increase of \$97 million.

This is a rough and rosy estimate, but it hopefully gives you a sense of the scale of the economic opportunity that this bill offers. I urge you to vote "ought to pass". Thank you for your time and consideration.

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¹ <https://www.census.gov/content/dam/Census/library/working-papers/2005/demo/2005-Day-Shin.pdf>