David Delmar Sentíes

Testimony for LD 471: Expand Intensive English Language Learner Programs

Public Hearing - March 3, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and honorable committee members,

I am testifying today in support of LD 471 to expand intensive English language learner programs in Maine. I happen to be the son of Mexican immigrants, and I had the privilege of growing up speaking almost exclusively Spanish at home. But that's not necessarily all that brings me here this morning.

I'm the Founder of an organization based in Boston and Philadelphia called Resilient Coders. It's a highly competitive free and stipended coding bootcamp. We train people from low income communities for careers as software engineers, and then connect them with jobs as such. We're really good at this. On average, we triple our graduates' salaries, from $33k, to $100k. Very few of them have had the privilege of graduating from college, because they can't afford the four years away from the workforce.

I have just recently moved to Maine. Since then, Resilient Coders has joined a coalition of organizations in Southern Maine to respond to an RFP from the Maine DECD. We were awarded a grant allowing us to run a pilot cohort in Portland, with immigrants and first-gens. We are immensely proud to be a part of a much broader effort to connect New Mainers with Maine's new economy. But we can only accept students who are proficient in English.

If there's only one thing you take from my testimony, it's this: Of the various demographic segments that we work with at Resilient Coders, our immigrants are consistently our strongest performers. And I'm not talking about those who come to this country already having had an illustrious career. I'm talking about young people who were born elsewhere, might have grown up elsewhere, but are launching their careers here. They tend to be our stars. I'm not here to speculate on why I think that is. I'm just sharing conclusions that I can back with data.

These days, I live in a state that has a workforce problem. It's my understanding there is a mismatch between the workforce demands of a national tech-driven economy and the proficiencies of many of Maine's workers, with AI already transforming so many sectors, and clean energy creating new ones. We have the training infrastructure here. We just need the people. I can testify, from both personal and professional experience, that we want our immigrants in our workforce. And we want them as quickly as possible. I urge you to support LD 471. Building a prosperous future for Maine in the new global economy will take all of us.