

Testimony of Keith Rosenberg, MD
In favor of LD 471
Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
March 3, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and honorable committee members, my name is Keith Rosenberg. I am an emergency medicine doctor with MaineHealth. I testify in my personal capacity today. I live in Portland, and I am here to speak in support of LD 471 to expand intensive English language learner programs in Maine.

This bill establishes a 2-year pilot program to expand the intensive English language learner programs of the UMaine system to an additional 780 learners, provides the support needed to attract and retain these learners, and adds an additional 24 graduates of USM's Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) online accelerated master's degree program to our state's workforce.

As a physician in the Emergency Department, I see firsthand the impact of staffing shortages. I see the burden of staff shortages on the staff who are there. This leads to high turnover, which exacerbates the workforce shortage.

I see longer wait times for patients, which can worsen patient outcomes, which is a fancy way of saying people can die. I know in some cities in the U.S., patients can check which Emergency Department near them has the shortest wait time, but that's a luxury that is not available to rural Mainers with only one hospital remotely close to them. If you're a rural Mainer who has just experienced a stroke or a heart attack, you likely only have one hospital to go to.

In our rural state, we worry about those hospitals closing entirely and staffing shortages certainly play into that. While a rural hospital in Maine closing completely due to staffing hasn't happened yet, we've seen a number of hospitals in rural Maine close their labor and delivery units due in large part to staffing challenges.

So I see it as a good thing that many New Mainers are already trained healthcare workers or desire to enter the medical field. Expanding the number of people who can improve their English skills and the number of people teaching those skills to others is exactly what our state needs. If we have a program in our state as strong as UMaine's intensive English program that can remove language barriers and get these folks into our hospitals sooner, let's expand it as this bill does. I ask that this committee vote "Ought to Pass" on LD 471.

Thank you.

Keith Rosenberg, MD

Portland, Maine