

**Testimony for LD 471: Expand Intensive English Language Learner Programs
Public Hearing - March 3, 2025**

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and honorable committee members,

My name is Ying Zhao, and I live in Bangor. I moved to Maine from China last summer. With 30 years of experience in the oil industry and advanced degrees in engineering and business, I was eager to contribute, build friendships, and prepare for future opportunities. But I quickly realized that the English I learned in school wasn't enough for everyday life, meaningful conversations, or professional settings. That's why I strongly support LD 471, which expands intensive English language programs in Maine.

When I arrived, I tried many ways to improve my English—online courses, local volunteer programs, and community groups. But most were too basic, lacked structure, or depended on inconsistent volunteer availability. The only truly effective program I found was the intensive English program at the University of Maine system. However, these programs are hard to access due to cost, space limitations, and enrollment restrictions. Many people who need them—like international professionals, spouses of visa holders, and new residents—are left without good options. LD 471 would change that by making high-quality English programs more accessible.

From my experience, this bill is essential because:

1. **It Fills a Critical Gap** – Many programs focus on either basic English or advanced academic English, leaving a gap for people who need professional, real-world language skills.
2. **It Supports Skilled Professionals** – New residents with work experience need more than just basic English. Clear communication, accurate descriptions, and strong interpersonal skills are essential for contributing to the workforce and community.
3. **It Provides a Proven Solution** – LD 471 expands an existing, structured program that has already demonstrated success in intensive English learning.
4. **It Reduces Barriers** – Many adults struggle with childcare, transportation, or financial constraints. This bill addresses those challenges by offering stipends and flexible learning opportunities.
5. **It Strengthens Maine's Communities** – Language is key to social and economic integration. When people can communicate effectively, they participate in local events, volunteer, and become engaged members of their communities.
6. **It Makes Maine More Competitive** – A state that invests in language education attracts and retains talented individuals and families, strengthening its workforce and economy.

If LD 471 had been available when I arrived, I could have had a clear, structured path to improving my English and integrating into my new home. Instead, I spent months searching for resources and struggling to find consistency. I want future new residents to have a better experience—one that helps them succeed and, in turn, benefits Maine as a whole.

I urge you to support LD 471. Thank you for your time, and I'd be happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,

Ying Zhao
(Signature)



Date: March 3, 2025