

Doris Rodriguez Testimony:

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and honorable committee members. My name is Doris Rodriguez and I am here to testify in support of LD 471, the English Language Bill. I was born in New York City and was sent to Puerto Rico at the age of 4 due to health reasons. I remember when I moved to New York City from Puerto Rico when I was nine, and I didn't speak any English at all, I felt completely lost. I had no idea what was happening in school, and I didn't even know how to use the bus to get home. I remember the feeling of panicking and not being able to connect with anyone. I had a teacher who told me "If I wanted to succeed I had to learn ENGLISH"

Today, I am a student teacher at a non-profit that teaches English in Westbrook, and I have many students who feel the same way. Without English, they feel lost, disconnected, and unable to provide for their families. I tell them, "You came to America to succeed, and this is where you can achieve all of your dreams. The only thing you need is English."

These students are so eager to learn, they come to classes at night after they have spent the entire day at work or taking care of their children. My students have a very hard time coming to these classes at night because many of them don't have childcare or access to a car, and the buses stop running before the class is over. But every night, they are there and ready to learn. Many students who have learned enough English keep coming back to help other students learn as well.

It should be easier to learn English in Maine, and this bill would remove many of the obstacles that currently make learning English so challenging. This program would benefit not only the students and their families as they are able to find better jobs with more English skills; it would also benefit Maine as a whole.

Giving more people in our community the skills they need to succeed is good for businesses looking for great employees, it generates more tax revenue for our state, and it is a huge benefit to Maine's economy. This is a community that wants to succeed, and wants to contribute to our state. They want to open new businesses, earn degrees, and build a life for themselves and their families. This bill would give them the opportunity they need and deserve. Thank you for your time. I would be happy to answer any questions.