



**University of Maine System Testimony Regarding  
*LD 471, Resolve, to Establish a Pilot Program to Expand Intensive English  
Language Learner Programs* — Presented by UMS Chief External &  
Governmental Affairs Officer Samantha Warren — March 3, 2025**

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs: My name is Sam Warren and I am the Chief External & Governmental Affairs Officer for the University of Maine System (UMS).

Maine's public universities have long been a destination for students from around the globe seeking world-class educational and research opportunities. To support students who join our System and need greater academic English language skills, the University of Maine and the University of Southern Maine (USM) started providing multilingual student support in the 1980s and since the 1990s, have offered intensive English language immersion programs.

These programs are generally designed to prepare non-native-English-speaking students for undergraduate or graduate programs at our public universities and for professional careers in which they will regularly interact with native English speakers. UMaine's program is intended for students with low or no English skills, while USM's has historically served students with intermediate and advanced English skills, though there are plans to expand intensive instruction to beginners and lower intermediate learners starting in 2026. Both programs provide 18-20 instructional hours a week for at least one semester and focus on oral communication and listening comprehension, reading, writing, grammar, and the career and cultural orientation necessary for success in both English-speaking academic and professional settings.

UMaine and USM have also extended enrollment opportunities in these intensive programs to community members who can commit to the time and rigor they require. For example, in 2023 UMaine was awarded a one-time grant that covered tuition and mandatory fees for Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) eligible learners, and provided courses on the flagship campus in Orono and at public libraries or other accessible locations in Bangor, Biddeford, Hinckley, Portland, South Portland and Westbrook, as well as online. The university also has an intensive English language instructor currently based in Portland as part of its Finish Strong initiative, which is intended to grow Maine's workforce and economy, including by supporting new Mainers to earn their UMaine degree and increase their employability and earnings. It should be noted that USM also received ORR funding.

Additionally, UMaine and USM have both customized English language learning programs through partnerships with Maine employers or community organizations. For example, USM partnered with a southern Maine manufacturing business to deliver weekly instruction (1.5 hours) for employees at the work site, focusing on oral communication, confidence and fluency, and workplace vocabulary.

Our students, both matriculated at our universities and not, have experienced economic mobility as a result of participating in these programs to the benefit of their families and our communities. They have transitioned into workforce training, including through Job Corps. They have earned door-opening postsecondary degrees, including through Maine's public universities and community colleges. And they have gone on to meaningful employment in Maine in high-demand fields, including health care, construction, and information technology.

Given this record of impact, we appreciate that the champions of LD 471 are proposing to expand access to English language acquisition and employment opportunities by encouraging more enrollment in our UMS intensive programs. Our System has been clear with you and your colleagues on Appropriations & Financial Affairs that our priority this legislative session is funding for UMS operations and capital improvements at or above the levels proposed in Governor Mills' biennial budget and endorsed by a bipartisan majority of this Committee last week. As Chancellor Malloy recently told you, sustaining the Governor's proposal for UMS is critical to our ability to maintain affordable access and student achievement and mitigate the impact of contractually obligated compensation costs and other inflationary increases on tuition-payers.

Intensive English language instruction is a proven gateway to employment, civic engagement, and employer and economic growth at a time when Maine needs to increase both the size and skill of its workforce. If the Legislature supports a pilot program generally consistent with the design and goals of LD 471, our public universities are positioned to provide the instruction if adequate additive appropriations are provided to cover our costs.

Regarding Section 6 of the bill, USM offers an accelerated and highly affordable Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) master's degree program. This flexible online program is designed for in-service teachers, can be completed in as few as 10 months, and leads to a Maine K-12 ESL endorsement that can be added to an existing teacher certification. We are proud that our graduates have a 100% pass rate on the relevant Maine Praxis Exam and are positively impacting English language proficiency in public school and adult education classrooms around the state to benefit their students and our state. Currently, USM's TESOL tuition is \$18,030. Expanding access to this program with State-subsidized tuition waivers would be a force multiplier in addressing the needs of Maine students and schools.

Thank you for your ongoing support of the University of Maine System and I welcome your questions.