



March 3, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

I am writing to provide information regarding LD 471, An Act To Establish an Adult English Language Learner Programs, and to share insight into the vital role Maine's Adult Education programs already play in serving multilingual learners across the state. This testimony is neither for nor against LD 471.

Maine's Adult Education programs have a long history of providing high-quality, cost-effective English language instruction to adult learners at basic, intermediate, and advanced levels. In 2023 alone, these programs served 4,161 multilingual learners, and in the current 2024-2025 program year, they have already supported 3,951 individuals. Many programs also maintain waiting lists, demonstrating both the demand for services and the need for additional resources to expand capacity.

In addition to traditional language instruction, Adult Education collaborates with employers to provide customized English language training, ensuring that individuals can enter the workforce more quickly and successfully. These targeted services help meet the needs of both learners and Maine's businesses, strengthening our economy and workforce.

Despite the essential role that Adult Education plays in serving Maine's adult learners, it remains significantly underfunded. Currently, the state funds only about one-third of program costs, with local communities bearing the remaining two-thirds. Additional investment in these existing programs would allow programs to expand access and enhance services without duplicating efforts.

We recognize that multiple approaches can contribute to supporting Maine's multilingual learners, and we welcome continued collaboration with all educational partners, including the University of Maine System. Our goal is to ensure that Adult Education remains part of the conversation when considering how best to serve this population.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate your commitment to supporting adult learners in Maine and would be happy to discuss how we can work together to strengthen educational opportunities for multilingual individuals.

Sincerely,

Shirley Wright, Executive Director, Maine Adult Education Association