



April 23, 2021

Senator Daughtry, Representative Brennan and Members of the 130th Legislature's Education and Cultural Affairs Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of *LD 1329 - An Act To Establish the Career Advancement and Navigation Initiative in the Department of Education To Lower Barriers to Career Advancement*. This initiative is much needed in the State of Maine at this time to effectively reduce barriers for those adult learners who are the hardest to serve as they transition to meaningful employment during a time of economic instability. Maine Adult Education is the "on ramp" for adults with lower educational skills to get back on track and become gainfully employed.

LD 1329, which has been proposed, would help underemployed and unemployed individuals acquire education, skills, licensure or other preparation needed to participate to their fullest potential in the workforce. Currently, Maine Adult Education programs struggle to provide these services in the best way due to limited funding. The most meaningful way to match lower-skilled individuals to jobs is customization. For example, if a growing employment sector has job openings in machining but an emphasis must be placed on safety, it would make sense for the learning pathway to be well-defined with the employer before and during training. Adding a career advancement and navigation specialist to four adult education regions in the state would make this work possible in the four areas most in need of this service, due to growing numbers and employment availability.

LD 1329 continues to build on successful partnerships that Maine Adult Education programs already have in place with the Maine Department of Labor, The Department of Professional and Financial Regulation, The Department of Economic and Community Development, and the Department of Health and Human Services. When this legislation is funded, adult education programs would also be able to build more meaningful partnerships with private employers and customize training as needed to get those in need into employment as quickly as possible.

Maine Adult Education programs are equipped to integrate basic skills in reading, writing and mathematics with sector specific training for a trade. Also integrated are those "soft" skills needed to attain and maintain a job, such as communication skills, personal presentation skills,

safety and other more intensive workforce preparation skills that a person might need. Adult education can also integrate contextualized English language learning to those new to Maine and the English language.

Having Career Advancement and Navigation Specialists who are specifically employed by Adult Education Hubs ensures that each person hired works in the defined region and is evaluated by the directors of each region. Customization to regional employment needs will be a critical piece of this project.

Thank you for your consideration. We are available in the event that there are questions regarding the development of this legislation.

Sincerely,

***Shirley N. Wright***

Shirley Wright, Executive Director  
Maine Adult Education Association