



April 22, 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 to effectively reduce barriers for adult learners 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, career planning and case management needed to participate to their fullest potential in the workforce. Currently, Maine Adult Education programs struggle to provide these services due to limited funding. The most meaningful way to match lower-skilled individuals to jobs is customization. An employer may identify particular skills required for entry-level employment that can be integrated into the training curriculum and addressed in tandem with the industry recognized credential. Take machining, for example, that may require additional safety training; 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 people 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. Adult Education programs also integrate 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.

Lewiston Adult Education has piloted this work with a Program Navigator. (This position has been pieced together with existing funding but is not available to as many low-level adults as needed.) She has worked with numerous students to review their career goals, discuss prior learning, review transcripts and foreign credentials, and to support pathways planning through the World of Work Inventory. She is able to help identify appropriate training opportunities and the educational needs required for goal attainment. Most recently, she has been instrumental in working with Lewiston Public Schools and Eastern Maine Community College to support a cohort of eight substitute teachers, some who are designated as Ed Tech 1 or 2, looking to complete the Learning Facilitator program; upon completion, these LPS employees will be eligible for Ed Tech 3 certification. This change in certification designation allows these individuals to move up the career ladder, to earn more, and to assume more responsibility within the classroom. Many of these individuals have experience in education in their home countries, but they need additional support navigating the certification process in the United States. The Program Navigator is essential to this process. One student pursuing such certification, Yasmine, participated in the second Educator Academy program through Lewiston Adult Education. While she has transitioned to Central Maine Community College to pursue her Associates Degree, she continues to work with the Program Navigator to discuss her college courses to ensure that these align to certification requirements in Maine. This is just one example that illustrates the type of support provided by the Navigator.

Having Career Advancement and Navigation Specialists who are specifically employed by Adult Education Hubs or districts 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,

***William Grant***

Director

Lewiston and Auburn Adult Education