



**Testimony of Jeff McLynch, Director, Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education,
before the Joint Committee on Ways and Means,
regarding Governor Baker's FY 2019 Budget Recommendations (H. 2),
submitted for the record, March 16, 2018**

FY 2019 Budget Request for Adult Basic Education (#7035-0002)

On behalf of the hundreds of thousands of adults in Massachusetts who lack a high school credential or are unable to speak English well enough to participate in a 21st century economy, the Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education respectfully urges the members of the Joint Committee on Ways and Means to reject Governor Baker's recent budget proposal and to appropriate \$34.5 million for adult basic education (Line Item #7035-0002) in FY 2019.

An investment in adult basic education (ABE) at this level would enable hard-working adults to acquire the skills they need to participate fully in today's labor market and provide for themselves and their families. An investment in ABE of this scale would also provide adults with the educational skills which lead to improved health outcomes, reductions in incarceration and recidivism, increased civic engagement, and greater success in education reform, as parents and caretakers are able to help their children and participate more fully in supporting their educations. In short, improved basic skills for adults across the state would help the Commonwealth to better address the public policy priorities that are at the forefront of our public debates.

FY 2019 Budget Language Request

In addition, MCAE respectfully requests that, as the House of Representatives and the Senate set appropriations for ABE for FY 2019, the members of both chambers refrain from including earmarks in any statutory language accompanying those funds. As the members of the Joint Committee may already be aware, the funds that are appropriated through Line Item 7035-0002 are distributed by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to an array of adult education providers across the Commonwealth through a competitive grant process under which there are no presumptive providers. Earmarking a portion of those funds for a particular entity undermines this grant process, is unfair to those programs who must adhere to rigorous accountability requirements under the grant process, and reduces the resources that might otherwise be available statewide for particularly effective or innovative programs.

Proposed Baker Budget Seeks to Shortchange Adult Education Yet Again

In the version of the FY 2019 budget that Governor Baker submitted to the legislature on January 24, he recommended an appropriation of just \$28.2 million for ABE. This figure is roughly 5 percent below the amount the Legislature has allocated for FY 2018 and marks the third straight year the Governor has sought to reduce the resources Massachusetts dedicates to ABE. What's more, his proposed cut comes on the heels of his efforts to veto approximately \$850,000 in funds for ABE last July.

Even more importantly, Governor Baker’s proposed cut would exacerbate the severe long-term decline in the real value of public resources afforded for ABE. Despite its far-reaching and long-lasting impact, state appropriations for Massachusetts’ ABE system declined 30 percent between FY 2001 and FY 2018 after adjusting for inflation, falling from \$43.8 million to \$30.3 million in constant FY 2019 dollars. If Governor Baker’s recommendations were to make it into law, that decline would reach 36 percent.

In September, the House of Representatives and the Senate wisely chose to override the Governor’s attempt to veto funds for ABE. MCAE urges the members of both chambers to act in a similar fashion this year. We ask that you turn aside the Governor’s short-sighted recommendations and begin to provide adult basic education programs the resources they need to serve the people and families of Massachusetts.

Impact of the Requested Appropriation

An appropriation of \$34.5 million in FY 2019 would enable Massachusetts’ ABE system to:

- Serve more students, moving adults off waiting lists and into programs;
- Reach underserved communities, increasing the likelihood that students are able enroll in programs near where they live or work;
- Strengthen program quality, advancing curriculum development to provide College and Career Readiness and linking instruction to the demands of existing and emerging labor markets, and;
- Improve working conditions for hundreds of dedicated instructors, advisors, and counselors, reducing turnover and disruption and increasing the continuity of services.

Of note, a well-established body of research has documented extensively the benefits that investments in adult basic education can yield. For example, a groundbreaking December 2014 study conducted for the US Department of Education, relying on nearly a decade’s worth of data, found that “individuals who participate in [adult basic skills] programs have higher future earnings as a result of participating” and that “income premiums are larger with more intensive participation” in such programs.ⁱ Similarly, as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have observed, “findings from [prior studies] suggest numeracy plays a critical role in a person’s ability to make informed decisions about his or her health. People with low numeracy are at increased risk of poorer health outcomes.”ⁱⁱ Thus, beginning to restore the purchasing power that the state’s ABE appropriation has lost over the last 17 years would help to enhance economic security, to foster healthier families, and to make communities safer.

Background on the Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education

MCAE is a statewide membership organization that champions the right of all adults to acquire 21st century literacy, English language, and numeracy skills, for those skills lead to strong families, vibrant communities, and broadly shared economic prosperity. MCAE’s member and partner organizations serve roughly 19,000 students in cities and towns throughout the Commonwealth.ⁱⁱⁱ Adult basic education services include literacy instruction from non-reader to intermediate level, math, preparation for high school equivalency, ESOL, and citizenship classes. These services are delivered by a diverse array of entities, including community-based organizations, local educational agencies, higher education institutions, correctional institutions, businesses, and labor unions.

Conclusion

Massachusetts has a long and proud history of promoting publicly-funded education, understanding well the benefits not only for individuals, but for the Commonwealth as a whole. Widely available, high quality public education can bolster students' future economic productivity, promote social and civic engagement, and, in turn, improve the quality of life for everyone living and working in Massachusetts. Though Massachusetts' financial support for adult basic education has deteriorated, in real terms, for more than a decade and a half, timely investments now can still yield real gains for the Commonwealth and its residents. Consequently, I once again urge the members of the Joint Committee to appropriate \$34.5 million for adult basic education in FY 2019.

I thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony for the record. If any members of the Joint Committee should have any questions about the information I have presented here or about MCAE and its work, I may be reached at 617-482-6223 or via email at jeffmclynch@mcae.net.

ⁱ U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education, *The Impact of ABS Program Participation on Long-Term Economic Outcomes*, Washington, DC, 2014; available via https://lincs.ed.gov/publications/pdf/ABS_EconomicOutcomes.pdf

ⁱⁱ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, *Health Literacy - Evidence Reviews & Research Summaries*; available via <https://www.cdc.gov/healthliteracy/researchevaluate/evidence-research.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ US Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) National Reporting System; available via <https://wdcrobcolp01.ed.gov/CFAPPS/OVAE/NRS/tables/view.cfm?state=MA&year=2015&tableID=3>