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**Testimony of Jeff McLynch, Director, Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education
before the Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security
in support of the Safe Communities Act (H.3269/S. 1305)
submitted for the record, June 9, 2017**

On behalf of thousands of adult educators and students across the Commonwealth, the Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education (MCAE) respectfully urges the Joint Committee to report favorably the Safe Communities Act. In MCAE's view, passage of the Safe Communities Act would help to preserve health and safety, protect the civil rights of all Bay Staters, and ensure that scarce public resources are used to address Massachusetts' most pressing priorities.

By way of background, 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, in turn, lead to strong families, vibrant communities, and broadly shared economic prosperity. MCAE's member and partner organizations serve roughly 19,000 students in dozens of cities and towns throughout the Commonwealth. Adult basic education services provide literacy instruction from non-reader to intermediate level, math, preparation for high school equivalency, ESOL and citizenship. These services are supported by a mix of federal and state funds, though the latter comprises the vast majority of such resources, and are delivered by a diverse array of entities, including community-based organizations, local educational agencies, higher education institutions, correctional institutions, businesses, and labor unions.

Many of the students enrolled in adult basic education programs are themselves immigrants to Massachusetts. The obstacles that they must surmount to achieve English literacy or to obtain a high school credential are often considerable in number and daunting in scale. Yet, many persist, for the betterment of themselves, their families, and the neighborhoods in which they live. Passage of the Safe Communities Act is essential if Massachusetts is to avoid making those obstacles even more substantial. Should Massachusetts fail to prohibit state and local law enforcement entities from participation in federal immigration enforcement activities, it will only foster an environment of fear and mistrust in which many are deterred from seeking the public services for which they are eligible and which are vital to improved physical and mental health and to greater economic security, services that include adult basic education.

Moreover, as the members of the Joint Committee are likely aware, Massachusetts faces both a short-term budget shortfall, arising from disappointing revenue collections, and a long-term structural budget deficit, attributable to the inability of the state's revenue system to keep pace with the cost of providing basic public services. These fiscal strains are already having an effect across state government. For instance, funding for adult basic education has fallen by more than 30 percent in real terms over the last

15 years, leaving approximately 18,000 adults waiting to enroll in local programs. Massachusetts should not make this already difficult situation worse by diverting state tax dollars to help carry out federal immigration policies that are at odds with the values held by the residents of the Commonwealth. Passage of the Safe Communities Act would prevent that from occurring.

Time and again, our members have seen that, given the opportunity, immigrants to Massachusetts can thrive, contributing their skills, energies, and dreams to a more robust and vibrant Commonwealth, just as prior generations of immigrants helped to make the state what it is today. Please report the Safe Communities Act favorably to keep those opportunities open and to assure all law-abiding Massachusetts residents that our state and local government is here to serve and protect them, regardless of their immigration status.

I greatly appreciate the opportunity to submit this testimony for the record. Should you have any questions about it or the work of MCAE generally, I would be happy to try to answer them. I may be reached at either 617-482-6223 or jeffmclynch@mcae.net.