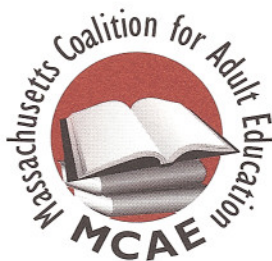


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## **Testimony Regarding the Reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA)**

**Submitted by Kenneth Tamarkin, Executive Director**

**Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education**

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I want to thank the Office of Vocational and Adult Education for giving me the opportunity to submit written testimony on the Reauthorization of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). I am Kenneth Tamarkin, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education (MCAE), the umbrella organization that represents Adult Basic Education (ABE) in Massachusetts. Our members comprise over 600 ABE practitioners and supporters, including directors, teachers, counselors, and other experienced staff. In the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, under the leadership of the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS), we have a high-quality Adult Basic Education service delivery system funded by WIA Title II and state funds. Given limited resources, the ABE community accomplishes a great deal, effectively serving over 20,000 adult learners a year.

We also have a Workforce Development system administered through the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development and Local Workforce Investment Boards (WIBS), which receives WIA Title I funds. Both ABE and Workforce Development are important and need increased support at the federal level through WIA since the demand for their services far outstrips their current capacity. ABE is an educational system that is most appropriately administered through the US Department of Education, while Workforce Development is primarily an employment, training and labor exchange system that is most appropriately administered through the US Department of Labor. WIA reauthorization must make it easier for these systems to collaborate to serve their clients and meet the needs of other stakeholders, including business, labor, and communities.

**MCAE strongly recommends authorizing \$850 million for fiscal year 2010 and such sums as may be necessary for each succeeding fiscal year, for WIA Title II.** WIA must include more adequate funding and support for the adult education system nationally. ABE and ESOL programs maintain long waiting lists, teachers lack adequate compensation and benefits, and programs operate on extremely lean (and declining) budgets that make it difficult if not impossible to meet fully the needs of students facing multiple barriers and large skill deficits and properly prepare them to succeed in their next steps in their lives. WIA Title II is a linchpin of our education system and is essential for providing the current and future workforce with the skills students need to succeed—as workers, as citizens, as parents and as community residents.

**MCAE supports the inclusion of “integrated education and training” in WIA Title I and adding “adult education” to the purpose of WIA.** We see the emphasis and encouragement of “integrated education and training” and “dual enrollment opportunities” as crucial for the coordination of efforts supported by both title I and Title II. In Massachusetts, collaboration between ACLS and the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development to provide learning opportunities that integrate instruction in basic skills with instruction in workforce skills targeting specific industries and career pathways is already underway through our Learn at Work Program.

**MCAE recommends that the United States Department of Education continue to administer WIA Title II.** We understand that learning is enhanced when basic skills are taught in a context that is important to the learner. Therefore, we support efforts to integrate basic skills education with workforce development training. However, adult learners are whole human beings whose interests, needs, and goals range far beyond the workplace. Therefore, we also support efforts to integrate basic skills education with basic health education, with civic education, and the transition to higher education. We also support the continuation of family education, including Even Start and other efforts to improve the education and involvement in the preK-12 system of the parents of school age children.

**MCAE supports reserving 12% of Title II funds for a new Section 244: Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education Programs.** In Massachusetts, well over half (60+%) of our ABE students are enrolled in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) classes. While obtaining and maintaining employment is the most common goal for these students, it is not the only goal. Many of these adult learners need to learn how to function in our society and participate in their communities. MCAE understands that ABE/ESOL students are family members and community residents, as well as workers, and that ABE/ESOL instruction must address all of those roles.

**MCAE values Massachusetts diverse Title II service delivery system and wants to see WIA reauthorization support the continuation of this system.** In Massachusetts, our services providers include community based organizations (CBOs), local educational agencies (LEAs), community colleges, libraries, workplaces, union halls, and correctional institutions. Any capable provider should have the opportunity to apply for WIA funding through an open and competitive process, such as is conducted in Massachusetts by ACLS.

**MCAE supports Title II supporting and funding staff development for ABE practitioners.** In our state, we have an exemplary staff development system for ABE programs and practitioners, the System of Adult Basic Education Support (SABES). This system has been impacted by funding cuts in recent years, but still provides crucial staff development services. The SABES system and the practitioners it serves would greatly benefit from increased federal support. However, we are concerned that SABES and ABE could be negatively impacted by unfunded mandates of breadth and intensity of staff development efforts that are desperately needed, but need to be properly funded in order to be effective.

**To address the digital divide, MCAE supports establishing a technology initiative to support Title II ABE programs and authorizing \$250,000,000 for this effort.** The

digital divide continues to be a very real concern for our state and the nation. Therefore, MCAE supports the proposed Title III-21st Century Technology and Skills for Adult Learners contained in the Adult Education and Economic Growth Act introduced in the Congress by Patrick Kennedy (D-RI) and Ruben Hinojosa (D-TX). The purpose of this title would be to expand access to technology to our most marginalized residents and assist adults to develop technology literacy. It would accomplish this through a statewide system that would include staff development focusing on technology, and investments in hardware, software, and distance learning capability, capacity, and delivery.

**MCAE supports the establishment of a federally run research institute focused on ABE.** In the long run, in order to use federal dollars most effectively, we need to support research into best practices in adult education, literacy and workplace skills. Therefore, MCAE was dismayed when the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) was closed a few years ago, and the focus of the National Institute for Literacy (NIFL) was recently redirected from adults to children. If a new federal ABE research institute is enacted, we will once again have professional tools to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, and impact of ABE.

Students and other stakeholders, including Workforce Development, Higher Education, Early Childhood Education, K-12 Education, the Health Care system, and potential or current employers demand that the ABE system successfully prepares students for the next steps in their lives. With all these stakeholders depending on the ABE system, it needs to have the resources and professionalism to accomplish its mission of helping students access either concurrent or subsequent workforce training, participate more fully in their communities, and increase their effectiveness as parents and family members. A reauthorized WIA which incorporates our recommendations would be a significant step towards the realization of this vision.