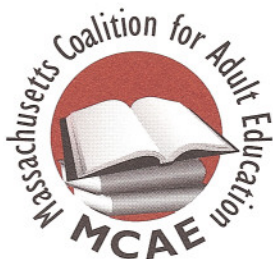


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Testimony Regarding the FY 2012 Budget for the Executive Office of Education

Submitted by Kenneth Tamarkin, Executive Director, Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education

Thank you, Secretary Reville, for holding this public forum on the Commonwealth's Fiscal Year 2012 budget. I am Kenneth Tamarkin, Executive Director of the Massachusetts Coalition for Adult Education (MCAE). MCAE's primary interest and concern is the educational and career advancement of adults who need assistance in overcoming basic skill gaps that impede them from reaching their full potential as workers and members of their families and communities. Toward that end, our top priority is the continued funding for the ABE line item 7035-0002 at least at the current level of almost \$28,000,000 (\$27,702,108). Even though there is a need for a substantial increase in the state investment in Adult Basic Education, MCAE realizes that with the state facing a potential \$1.5 billion budget shortfall, maintaining current funding for the Adult Basic Education (ABE) line item 7035-0002 might be the best that is possible. We strongly recommend against any reductions in 7035-0002, since any further cuts might jeopardize federal ABE funds of approximately \$10,000,000, since those funds are subject to a state maintenance of effort.

MCAE supports increases in both the quantity and quality of ABE instructions. In order to accommodate the many adults who are requesting ABE instruction, we need to increase the capacity of ABE. The ABE system needs increased investments so that it can successfully serve more adult learners per year. We need to provide more opportunities to increase the intensity of ABE instruction. Analysis of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's own data shows that there is a correlation between student gains and attainment of student goals and the intensity of instruction. Increasing intensity can be accomplished through a combination of longer class hours and increasing use of Distance Learning opportunities that have been developed by Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS).

In order to run an effective and efficient ABE system, we need to strengthen its infrastructure. That includes ensuring that learning environments and staff are up to standards. A crucial part of that infrastructure is the staff and program development provided by the System for Adult Basic Education Support (SABES). SABES needs to be adequately funded so that it can maximize its impact. Another important component of our infrastructure is the diversity of ABE providers. Yet, despite ACLS funding over 100 ABE programs, there are some areas of the Commonwealth that are underserved. New resources are needed to provide services in underserved areas.

Finally, the ABE system will be judged on how successful adult learners are in the next steps in their lives. Students completing ABE/ESOL instruction need to successfully transition to post-secondary education, workforce training, a new job, or a better job.

Given the fiscal challenges of the past few years, we applaud the level of professionalism and collaboration exhibited by the Adult and Community Learning Services (ACLS) division of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in its management of ABE funds. They have maintained a commitment to excellence, which helps ensure that the limited funding of ABE is spent wisely and effectively. We are pleased to see the full implementation of the Learn at Work Program, a collaboration with Commonwealth Corporation and look forward to seeing the outcomes of that program. We appreciate the ability of the Executive Office of Education to collaborate with the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development to provide funding opportunities that provide learning opportunities for incumbent workers. ACLS remains the appropriate venue for the overall management of ABE because of its level of expertise and broad understanding of the various goals of ABE/ESOL instruction and the diverse delivery system that has worked so well in Massachusetts.

We were delighted that Governor Patrick has reiterated his support for the New Americans Agenda, especially its call for expanded instruction for English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL). In the ACLS managed system, we have a state-wide system of providers already in place who have the experience and expertise to meet the ESOL goal of the New Americans Agenda.

MCAE supports integrated programming as pedagogically sound. In addition to integrating basic skills with workforce skills, ABE and ESOL classrooms currently integrate skills instruction with civic participation, citizenship, parenting and family literacy, health literacy, transitions to higher education, as well as other student goals. We encourage continuing to move forward on integrating ABE, ESOL, and skills training so that people can get or keep a job, companies can find the employees they need, and employees can further develop their skills. We urge you to continue to support the full spectrum of student goals. ACLS must continue to collaborate with the Corrections system to provide ABE/ESOL in our Houses of Correction. In addition, ACLS must collaborate with the K-12 educational system to enhance Family Literacy and the educational level of parents and with the higher education system to ensure that more students successfully transition from ABE/ESOL to Certificate or Degree programs in Community Colleges and other institutions of higher education.

We are supportive of funding of the Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund and the Workforce Training Fund (7003-0701), and urge you to support adequate funding for both funds next year. We also would like to see it made easier for companies to access the Workforce Competitiveness Trust Fund and the Workforce Training Fund for basic skills and integrated instruction for incumbent workers.

In the current economic climate, Massachusetts residents need the Adult Basic Education System and the Workforce System more than ever. They also need these two systems to work together as they have been doing to meet the needs of Commonwealth residents, workers, employers, and communities.