

## **Public Testimony**

### **Before the Joint Fiscal Committees of the New York State Legislature Elementary and Secondary Education Hearing for Fiscal Year 2019-2020**

On behalf of CARECEN, thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on the importance of adult literacy education for our students. The Central American Refugee Center of New York (CARECEN) has served the immigrant communities of Long Island since 1983, providing low- or no-cost immigration legal services, including citizenship classes and naturalization preparation services. In July 2016, with the help for the Office for New Americans (ONA), CARECEN launched the Pathway to English program, expanding its services to include free English classes. These classes have been geared towards primarily low-income immigrants in the Hempstead and Brentwood communities, many of whom have never finished elementary school much less a high school education. Since 2016, Pathway to English has served over 1,200 adult students toward literacy, communicative competence, and general English proficiency. Yet, there remains a vast need for continued education services for adult immigrants with Limited English Proficiency (LEP).

As a member of the New York City Coalition for Adult Literacy (NYCCAL), a cooperative comprised of adult literacy teachers, managers, students, and allies from over 40 community-based organizations, CUNY campuses, and library programs across New York City, we believe that the ability to read and write, learn English, obtain a High School Equivalency, and enter workforce training and post-secondary education is the right of every New Yorker. It is the cornerstone to an equitable and just society. NYCCAL advocates for an adult literacy system that provides high quality, comprehensive, and accessible educational services to all New Yorkers who need them.

The current need for adult ESOL far outweighs the resources supplied in prior years, meeting providing only 4% of the necessary seats to ELLs. With over 3.5 million New Yorkers—immigrants and native-born alike—lacking English proficiency, a high school diploma or both, our State has a long way to go in fostering opportunities for all to truly succeed. Let's increase rather than decrease opportunities for further education to all of New York State's residents!

#### **Adult Literacy Education (ALE)**

ALE funds English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), Adult Basic Education (ABE), and High School Equivalency (HSE) preparation classes. Together, these programs strengthen learners' literacy skills and credentials while increasing employability and earnings potential of adult learners across New York State.

However, the Governor's Executive Budget proposal aims to cut the \$1.5 million added by the Legislature in the FY2018-19 Enacted Budget, which would reduce ALE funding to \$6.3 million.

We respectfully request your support to restore the \$1.5 million and the additional investment of \$7.5 million into ALE programs. This investment would raise ALE funding to \$15.3 million.

Such an investment would greatly benefit individuals in our program, like \*Anna, who began as an adult literacy student with very little spoken English and a passion to learn! She came to America from an agricultural family in hopes of finding better opportunities. Since then, she has received on-the-job training, has been promoted, and continues to show improvements in literacy and communication skills. Now in our intermediate English class, Anna dreams of owning her own home, starting her own business, and obtaining her GED/HSE. Martín came to our program as a beginner student with dreams of attending a university. Through hard work and determination, he has surpassed intermediate English and enrolled in a community college program as his next step towards a degree-granting program. Gina's one goal for 2019 is to listen to her son and understand "everything" he tells her about his day at school. Gina's son, while bilingual, is a native English speaker and US citizen, and Gina's limited English proficiency hinders her day-to-day communication with her children, something we take for granted every day.

Beyond visible results, the most important return on investment is witnessing the growth in confidence each of our students feel, their ability to participate more easily within their English-speaking communities, and the sense of community they find among their classmates and teachers. ALE and ESOL programs change lives and impact futures!

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of adult literacy education programs. We look forward to working with you to ensure that our students will continue to have access to crucial programs that provide a pathway to economic mobility, social integration, parent-child engagement, improved health outcomes and improved community safety.

**Becca Reed**

**ESOL Services Coordinator**

**Pathway to Citizenship | Pathway to English - Long Island**

Central American Refugee Center (CARECEN)

91 N. Franklin Street, Suite 208

Hempstead, NY 11550

[\(516\) 489-8330](tel:5164898330)

Central American Refugee Center (CARECEN)

2000 Brentwood Rd., 2nd Floor

Brentwood, NY 11717

[\(631\) 273-8721](tel:6312738721)

*\*Student names have been changed to protect identity and respect privacy.*