

Adult Education & Literacy: A Key Piece of the Workforce Puzzle

House Commerce Committee
Testimony on H.703





Adult Education & Literacy should be included in H.703

- ✓ The AEL providers are part of the *existing framework for service delivery* for people who have goals around education, career development, and job skills.
- ✓ The AEL providers add value to virtually every part of the workforce development proposals in H.703.



Adult Education and Literacy services help people build the assets they need to move out of poverty successfully, as well as the confidence to continue to move toward success throughout their lives.

We help students to identify concrete goals and then break those goals down into steps.

We celebrate every achievement so that students can see that they can succeed.

Our students set goals in the domains of:

- Family and life
- Academics
- Career and college readiness

Our services include:

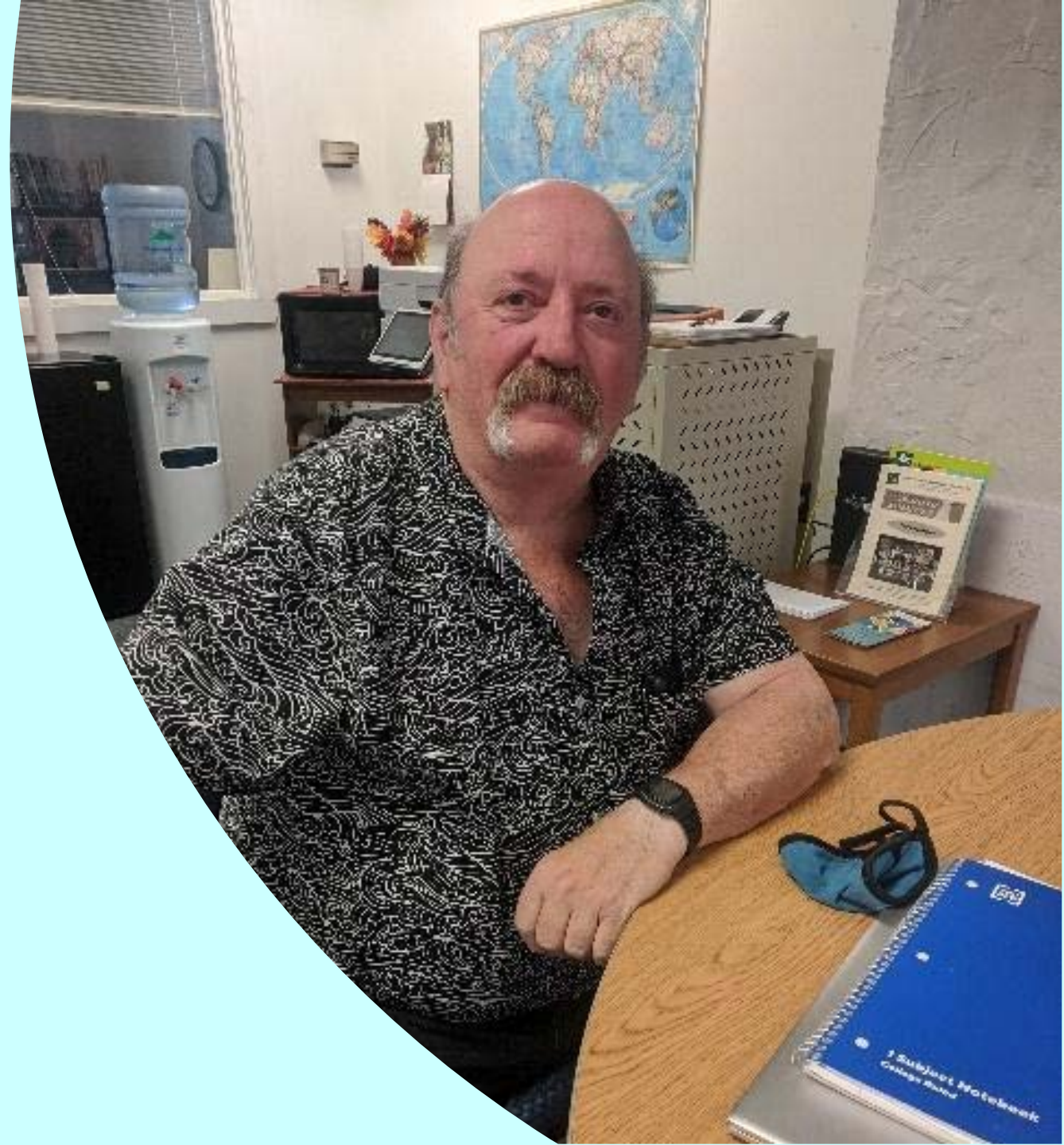
- Literacy Education: Reading, Writing, Math including computer and financial literacy education
- English Language Learning and US Citizenship preparation
- High School Diploma and GED Credentialing
- Career and College Readiness



Our work often involves changing expectations so that students can see their own potential.

- In testimony to the House Commerce Committee, VDOL identified 5 activities “...involving organizations and individuals that contribute to successful employment and career advancement...in ways that meet employer’s [sic] labor force needs.”
 - Recruitment
 - Training
 - Matching
 - Advancement
 - Retention

Two of these activities, Training (“Pre-employment, Occupational Skills, Classroom vs. Workplace”) and Advancement (“Reskilling, Upskilling”), are currently provided by AEL providers throughout Vermont.





AEL is part of the State's plan

The Goals outlined in the WIOA State Plan submitted by State Director of Workforce Development, Sarah Buxton, include:

Goal 1: Connect Vermonters to the education, training, and supportive services needed to enter and advance along a career pathway that leads to greater financial independence.

Goal 2: Increase the number of women, veterans, minorities, people with disabilities, and other underrepresented people employed in the skilled trades, science, technology, engineering, and mathematics fields, advanced manufacturing, and other priority industry sectors in Vermont.

Goal 3: Increase the number of Vermonters with barriers to employment who complete high school, earn a post-secondary credential - including an industry-recognized certificate, registered apprenticeship, or post-secondary degree program - and become employed in occupations that align with the needs of Vermont's employers.

Goal 4: Improve Vermont's workforce development system by continuously aligning, adapting, and integrating workforce education and training programs and career and supportive services to meet the needs of all customers.

Goal 5: Expand Vermont's labor force by helping more Vermonters enter the labor market and assisting out-of-state workers in securing employment with Vermont employers and relocating to Vermont

The Adult Education & Literacy Providers contribute to all five of these goals.



Success looks different for every student, and many students' success stems from a shift in mindset.

H.703 would provide many opportunities for the people who live in Vermont and people who do not yet live in Vermont.

However, some folks who would benefit from these opportunities and would gladly step into the jobs identified as those with shortages may not yet be quite ready to take advantage of these opportunities.

The AEL providers help to identify, recruit and support the people who otherwise would be left out of this inspiring bill.

Adult Education & Literacy help to build our workforce

- According to Vermont's 4-year WIOA plan, the purposes of the Adult Education & Literacy programs are to assist individuals to increase their academic skills to a level where they can
 1. obtain a high school diploma or GED
 2. obtain employment, or
 3. successfully enter postsecondary education or training.
- The Adult Education and Literacy providers serve a population of potential employees who are already here, and already seeking opportunities to improve academic and training qualifications that would allow them to join or advance in the workforce.
- We also work with English Language Learners to help refugees and immigrants successfully enter Vermont's workforce.

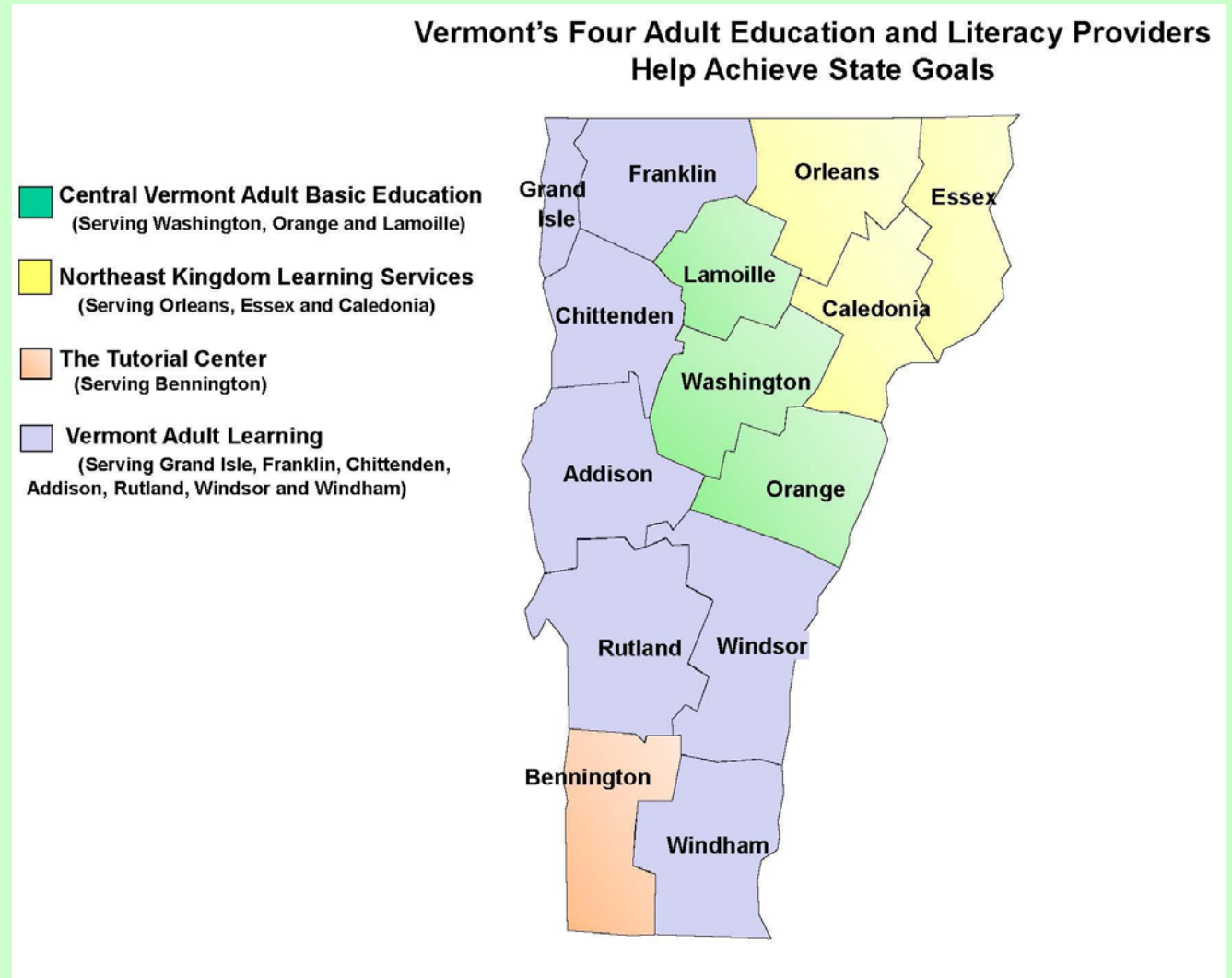


Our Request: an additional \$1.4m

for FY2023 to cover operational costs

Categories of Funding and Estimates of Costs for \$1.4million FY23 budget request:

- Staffing salary & benefits
- Technology needs & software upgrades
- Hardware (textbooks, supplies & other instructional materials)
- Outreach/Recruitment
- Property maintenance and services



Adult Education and Literacy providers offer a broad range of services that are targeted, tailored and relevant to each student's goals and needs.

With additional investments in the Adult Education & Literacy providers, Vermont could extend regional workforce expansion and paid work-based learning and training with a population that is already here, and that the State is already investing in through social support programs such as Reach-Up, CTE, free tuition.



Vermont's Adult Education & Literacy Providers help to achieve Vermont state goals.

By investing in the Adult Education & Literacy providers, the State would support the population level outcomes in statute. Vermont's population-level quality of life outcomes are intended to reflect the well-being of all Vermonters, and indicators reported to measure the extent to which outcomes are achieved are intended to represent the experience of all Vermonters, including and especially Vermonters who are members of marginalized groups. Investing in AEL will specifically support the following outcomes:

- Vermont has a prosperous economy.
- Vermont's families are safe, nurturing, stable, and supported.
- Vermont's children and young people achieve their potential.



Between 2017 and 2021, AEL providers served over 10,000 students

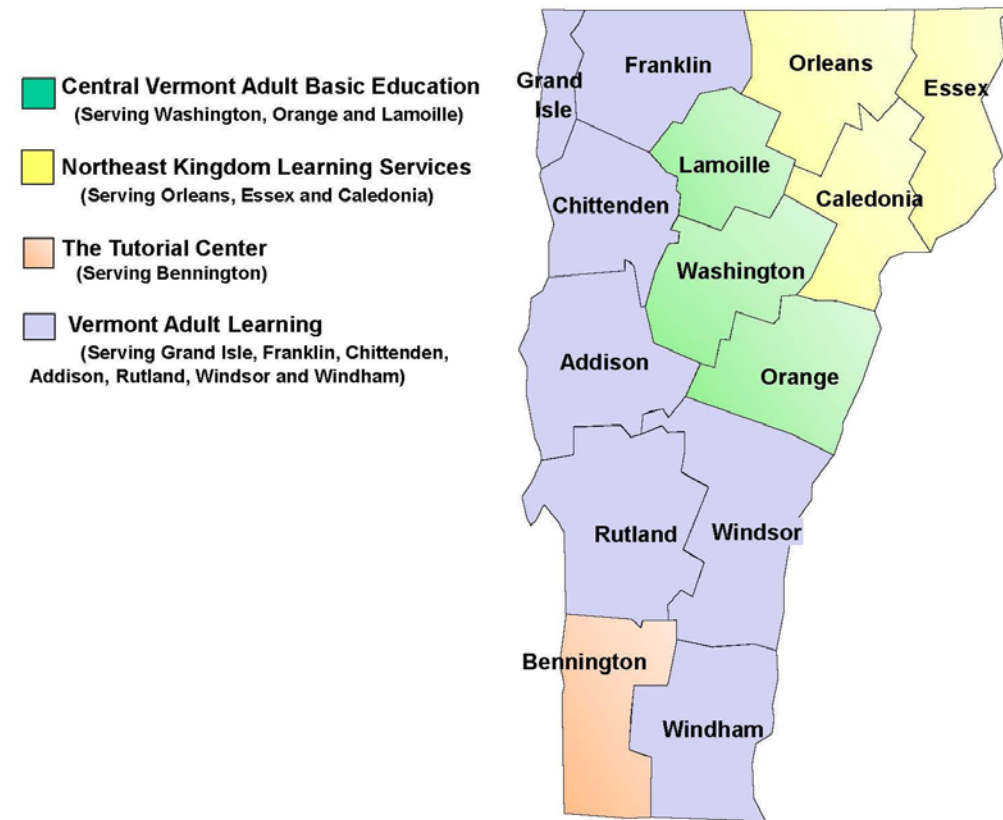
These students had many kinds of success:

- Attained specific skills to get a job or a better job
- Earned a high school diploma or GED
- Achieved a certification or other credential for a job
- Decided to attend college or other educational & career development opportunities
- Improved their English language abilities to apply their skills and education to careers here in Vermont

Over those 5 years, the average cost per student served by the AEL providers was \$3,124.

Our Request:
an additional \$1.4m
base funding
for FY2023
to cover
operational costs

Vermont's Four Adult Education and Literacy Providers
Help Achieve State Goals



Testimony to House Committee on Commerce and Economic Development
March 8, 2022
Brian Kravitz, Waterbury, VT

Good Afternoon.

For the record, I am Brian Kravitz, a resident of Waterbury, Vermont. I am the Development and Outreach Director of Central Vermont Adult Basic Education. Along with Northeast Kingdom Learning Services, The Tutorial Center, and Vermont Adult Learning, we comprise Vermont's Adult Education and Literacy Network, the AELN. Together we serve every city and town all 14 counties in Vermont, and provide free essential services, including career readiness and workforce development, to out of school adults, age 16+.

SLIDE ONE

On behalf of Vermont's Adult Education and Literacy Network, thank you for your time. I'm honored to be speaking with you today.

SLIDE TWO

Adult Education and Literacy, referred to as AEL, IS a KEY piece of the workforce puzzle, and as such we ask that it be included in H.703

– There are 36,000 adults in Vermont without a high school credential, and tens of thousands more without the skills to matriculate into and be successful in college and/or career training programs. Vermont is actively seeking refugees to enter our workforce and fill positions, many of whom are lacking English skills. We, the State of Vermont, are working to train, upskill, reskill, and educate, so that we can fill positions, grow, and prosper. It is important to recognize that, for tens of thousands of Vermonters, AELN is the first and often only stop on their path to the transformative opportunities that Vermont is offering.

– Much of AELN's work is in helping Vermonters obtain the specific assets that they need to succeed in careers and further education: workforce development. These assets are often hard and tangible, such as high school credentials and improved basic skills. They are also those "soft skills" necessary for success in the workplace: organization, time management etc. AELN is integral to the workforce development proposals in H.703.

AELN is the entryway into career readiness and workforce development for tens of thousands of our most vulnerable Vermonters, those with low literacy, under-education, or those simply in need of increased skills so that they can succeed. These Vermonters are the untapped piece of the workforce puzzle, and our inclusion in the H.703 budget ensures that the goals of the Bill can be met.

SLIDE THREE

The work of AEL is entirely individualized and centered on the unique goals of our students. What do they need for career and further education? What do they need to better their life and family? What specific academics do they need? Many don't come to us with career goals, but as they gain assets and skills they recognize the opportunities that are now open to them.

AEL services help Vermonters to build lifelong and incommutable assets, the assets that can change their lives now, in the future, and also those of future generations: literacy (reading, writing, math and computers), English Language Learning and citizenship, high school credentialing, and career and college readiness. Armed with the necessary skills and assets, many of our students find the strength and ability to, once and for all, break cycles of generational low education and under-education that leads to unemployment, under employment and poverty. AELN students are Vermont's untapped workforce, and with the goals, assets and skills provided by AELN, they can and do enter our workforce.

SLIDE FOUR

In recent testimony to the House Commerce Committee, the Vermont Department of Labor identified 5 activities that contribute to "successful employment and career advancement; 2 of those activities are implicit to the mission of Vermont's AELN:

- Training; and
- Advancement

Adult Education and Literacy is integral to workforce development.

SLIDE FIVE

In meaningful and outcome driven ways, The Adult Education and Literacy Providers contribute to each of the five (5) stated goals of the WIOA State Plan –

- For the tens of thousands of Vermonters without high school credentials or the prerequisite skills, AELN is the connector to job training programs and further, formal education in the career pathways.
- The vast majority of our students fall into the category of "underrepresented." From FY17-21: 32% BIPOC, 55% female, 39% with at least 1 disability. AEL is often the first step of their pathways into skilled trades and priority industry sectors.
- Every one of our students comes to us with a barrier to employment: low literacy, under-education, poverty, homelessness, to name a few. We are their first and often only stop in their quests for high school credentials, industry relevant credentials, post-secondary educations, and pathways to careers.
- We are nimble and responsive – continuously aligning, adapting and integrating workforce exploration, education, and training into the education plans for our students.

- From FY17-21 43% of our students were unemployed. With our support many were able to move into the workforce.

SLIDE SIX

One of the most valuable traits of the Adult Education and Literacy system is that we recognize that every student can be successful, and that individual successes are subjective. What does this mean for our students? It's a change of mindset, from, "I can't because the systems are against me," to, "I can, because I have the supports I need to reach my goals."

Support for AELN, in H.703, will ensure that all Vermonters have the opportunities to learn, grow, and thrive, the same opportunities that Martha, pictured in this slide, had. Martha arrived to Vermont a single parent with no English skills, a mid-elementary education, and locked into low paying jobs. With the support of Vermont's AELN she learned English, obtained a high school diploma, matriculated into and completed a cosmetology program. With her Industry Relevant Credential, IRC, she followed her American Dream and opened a successful business. She gives back by inviting Cosmetology students into her salon so that they can gain real-life experience. Martha's mindset transformed She calls adult education a "blessing," but we know that AELN offered an opportunity, and she seized it. Supporting AELN in H.703 will ensure that all Vermonters have the same opportunities for new mindsets and growth.

SLIDE SEVEN

Vermont's 4 year WIOA Plan identifies the purposes of the AEL Programs to assist individuals to increase their skills to a level where they can

1. Obtain a high school diploma or GED
2. Obtain employment, or
3. Successfully enter post-secondary education or training

Currently, 54% of our over 1,300 AELN students are unemployed. Through the assets they build and credentials they earn, they can and do enter our workforce, filling high need positions, in sectors from manufacturing to healthcare.

SLIDE EIGHT

Our request, for an additional \$1.4 million in FY 2023, is to cover operational costs in 5 core areas:

Staffing & Benefits – competitive wages and benefits are a must in order to retain employees and be competitive in hiring. We also must fill vacant positions, left open due to funding shortfalls, so that we can maintain our high levels of service

Technology needs/software upgrades - to facilitate remote learning we need increased internet speeds, more robust networking systems, and new equipment.

Textbooks/supplies and other instructional materials – as we begin to see more students coming to us the demand for more instructional materials rises as well.

Outreach and Recruitment – we need financial assistance to support the development and sustainability of a robust, ongoing, statewide and local outreach and recruitment campaigns, especially important because of the many recent high school drop-outs since Covid began.

Property maintenance and services – To cover ever rising operating costs: heat, rents, air purifiers, and travel reimbursements due to increasing fuel costs.

SLIDE NINE

With an additional investment of \$1.4 million for the Adult Education and Literacy providers, Vermont could extend regional workforce expansion and paid, work-based learning and training. The State is already investing in social support programs such as Reach Up, CTE, and free tuition, and support of AELN truly completes the puzzle.

SLIDE TEN

- Vermont has a prosperous economy
- Vermont's families are safe, nurturing, stable and supported
- Vermont's children and young people achieve their potential

These are the State population level outcomes in statute. These are the guide posts for where we want to be as a State.

The vital work that the Adult Education and Literacy providers perform is a crucial piece in helping the State towards realizing these outcomes.

SLIDE ELEVEN

Between FY 2017 and 2021 AEL providers served over 10,000 Vermonters.

- Thousands improved their work readiness by gaining essential assets in career and college readiness.
- 71% of our students did not have a high school credential, which is of utmost importance in entering a trade, career, or career training programs.
- Through AEL, 1,164 Vermont adults earned a high school credential. Due to work, family, and life, it can take years to obtain that credential, which is life altering in that it immediately opens opportunities.
- 217 students earned an IRC or credential of value, and 486 entered post-secondary or job training programs. These numbers are based on goal completion while they were students of the AELN. Although impossible to track longitudinal data, we know that many go on to further schooling or certification programs well after their time with us. The assets they gain through AEL open doors for the rest of their lives.
- Almost 1,200 non-native English speakers improved their English skills so that they could enter the workforce. Although many came to us with low education levels, we also support those with advanced degrees.

Over those 5 years, the average cost per student served by the AEL providers was a little over \$3,000 – with outcomes that directly support workforce development, that’s some serious bang for your buck!

SLIDE TWELVE

We respectfully request that you add \$1.4 million to H.703 in support of operational costs for Vermont’s Adult Education and Literacy Network, for FY23. It is an investment in a system that is solid, long standing, and changes the lives of Vermonters by opening up opportunities for careers and further education. Our system responds to the individual and dynamic needs of students and workforce sectors alike. Our system develops personalized instruction that is specific to the unique hopes, dreams and goals of each and every student. Through their work, our students change their lives, open opportunities, and add to the economy in ways previously thought impossible. Your support of our request will have a profound Return on Investment, on many levels. It will affect individuals, families, businesses, and Vermont as a whole. H.703 is an incredibly impactful bill. The addition of \$1.4 million for AELN will have deep and positive effects on Vermont’s workforce and future.

I have also submitted to you a case-study, video and testimonial, which all speak to the value of AELN in the workforce development puzzle. Please take a few moments to read and view them.

We ask that you please support and recommend this request.

Thank you again for your time today.