

TESTIMONY 01/06/2022 House Appropriations Committee

Good Morning,

I'm Michelle Faust, a resident of Irasburg and Executive Director of Northeast Kingdom Learning Services.

For over 50 years, NEKLS has provided Adult Education and Literacy services for a region that covers 2,030 square miles and includes the 54 cities, towns and villages that make up the tri county region known as the Northeast Kingdom.

NEKLS has a teaching staff of 13 highly qualified professionals who work in learning centers in Canaan, Island Pond, Newport, St Johnsbury and Hardwick, providing in person, hybrid and remote learning options.

I am asking that you support the statewide AEL provider network with an appropriation of \$350,000 for fiscal year 2022 to address budget deficits due to COVID.

The Adult Education and Literacy providers serve adults in Vermont who need help with basic skills in order to access other educational or career opportunities. The AEL Network has not received *any* additional AEL financial support from the State during the entire COVID -19 pandemic.

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

Success for the AEL providers involves us continuing to adapt, revise and change in response to the impact that the COVID19 pandemic has had on us.

We are at a critical point in time. We've done all we can on our own. The AEL Provider Network has been financially shaken and must be stabilized. Now is the time to make this investment in the system that supports the future success of the students we serve.

Accessing college and workforce training programs is relatively easy but being able to be successful in those programs requires having solid foundational skills and a growth mindset. Our VT college and CTE programs can only be as successful as the students enrolling. The AEL system primes them for success right from the start.

Again, I urge you to please support the statewide AEL provider network with an appropriation of \$350,000 for fiscal year 2022 to address budget deficits due to COVID.

Thank you for your time, and thank you for listening.

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Executive Director

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