

TESTIMONY OF KARL COLEMAN
BEFORE THE VERMONT HOUSE AND SENATE EDUCATION COMMITTEES
April 16, 2026

Members of the Vermont House and Senate Education Committees, I thank you for the opportunity to address you today and to submit my written testimony. My name is Karl Coleman. I am a resident of White River Junction, Vermont, where I work as a peer support specialist for a small non-profit. I am speaking before you today because I want to tell you about a transformation – not of a building or a road, but of a life. My life. And it happened because of the Adult Education program at Vermont Adult Learning.

In 2002, I left high school at the age of 17 after completing only my freshman year. At that time, I did not have a lot of structure at home and it did not feel like high school was giving me the support and guidance that I needed. For a long time after that, I felt like I was standing outside of my own future, looking in through a locked door. Without my high school diploma, I felt stuck. I knew I had the drive and the work ethic, but without this credential, on paper, I was invisible to the employers I wanted to work for.

In 2021, I was fortunate to obtain my current position as a peer support specialist helping addicts seeking recovery. I am very passionate about this work and love what I do. However, to continue in my position and become better at my job, I recognized that I needed to improve my skills and finally obtain my high school credential.

When I first walked through the doors of Vermont Adult Learning in May of 2025, I was nervous. I was not sure if I could actually get my GED, or if I would just be another number in a classroom. But what I found there was something I never expected. This was not a traditional school. It was a place that welcomed me in, accepted me for who I am, and never once made me feel that I could not succeed.

I want to talk specifically about the teachers at Vermont Adult Learning. To call them “staff” does not do them justice. They are some of the most wonderful, caring, and dedicated people I have ever met. In a world where things often feel rushed, these teachers stop and listen. They saw my potential even when I could not see it myself. Their willingness to help – staying late to explain a math problem for the fifth time, or offering a word of encouragement when I felt like giving up – is the reason I am here today. They don’t just teach subjects; they champion human beings. They made me feel like my success mattered to them personally.

As I write this testimony, I have passed two of the four GED tests - social studies and English Language Arts. These were the biggest hurdles in my learning since reading and writing have always been a struggle. However, I overcame them because I put my trust and faith in the teachers at Vermont Adult Learning and they encouraged me to do the work needed to pass these tests.

My teachers are confident I will pass the last test to earn my GED next month. In total, it will have taken me one year to do what, in other times of my life, I thought was impossible. I never thought I would get my high school credential. However, because of Vermont Adult Learning, I will be able to advance in my position and be a more stable provider for my family. In addition, I am a more confident individual and a more engaged member of my community. Vermont Adult Learning has not just given me an education; it has given me back my future.

Thank you for your time and for supporting Vermont Adult Learning in this important and much needed work to provide adult education opportunities to people like me.