



# National Coalition for Literacy

To:

Senator Tammy Baldwin, Chair  
Labor, Health and Human Services,  
Education, and Related Agencies  
Subcommittee  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
Washington, DC 20510

Sen Shelley Moore Capito, Ranking Member  
Labor, Health and Human Services,  
Education, and Related Agencies  
Subcommittee  
Senate Appropriations Committee  
Washington, DC 20510

From: Deborah Kennedy, Executive Director, National Coalition for Literacy

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Subj: FY 25 Written Public Witness Testimony for the Record

On behalf of the National Coalition for Literacy (NCL), an alliance of the leading national and regional organizations dedicated to advancing adult education, family literacy, and English language acquisition in the United States, I write to encourage robust funding in FY 2025 for the activities carried out by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) under the provisions of the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA), Title II of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Specifically, NCL urges Congress to provide \$810 million (an 11% increase) over the 2024 enacted level of \$729.2 million for AEFLA State Grants and National Activities. This would represent the first step in a five-year process of increasing AEFLA funding over 5 years to a total of \$1 billion per year.

The adult education programs that federal AEFLA funding supports are critical elements of the overall federal investment in workforce and life skills development for U.S. adults, contributing to the strength and resilience of every community. These programs give participating adults opportunities to develop the literacy, numeracy, digital, English language, and employability skills they need to obtain and retain employment, ensure the health and financial security of their families, pursue further training and career opportunities, and contribute in positive ways to the life of their

community. Support for adult education is an investment that returns far more than it costs.

- Literacy and numeracy skills are linked to employment status and income level; higher skill levels correlate to higher earnings potential, resulting in higher tax revenue for the community. Adult education participants with more than 100 hours of instruction average \$10,000 more in annual income ([Morgan, Waite, & Diecuch, 2017](#)).
- Adults with higher skill levels have better health outcomes, resulting in greater productivity in the workplace and ability to participate in community life, as well as decreased need to draw on public health care assistance ([van der Heide et al., 2013](#)).
- The education level of parents is strongly associated with children’s cognitive development and is a strong predictor of other factors that contribute to children’s well-being ([Jackson, Kiernan, & McLanahan, 2017](#)).

The effectiveness of federally funded adult education and family literacy programs is demonstrated by the national data for Program Year 2022-2023 (July 1, 2022-June 30, 2023) just released by [OCTAE](#). According to the OCTAE Connections April 2024 Newsletter, “national AEFLA performance increased across all primary indicators, with the largest increases in the Employment during the Fourth Quarter after Exit indicator, which saw a 7% increase, and the Median Earnings during the Second Quarter after Exit indicator, which saw a 9.1% increase.” The value of adult education for participants is further demonstrated by the attendance figures. According to the newsletter,

The national adult education program enrolled 1,120,769 participants in PY2022-23, an annual increase of 22%. With over 200,000 additional participants in PY2022-23, the AEFLA program achieved the largest consecutive enrollment growth of all WIOA core programs combined and continues to make great strides in serving learners and workers with barriers to employment.

- AEFLA programs enrolled 294,084 youth participants between the ages of 16 and 24, representing more than 26% of AEFLA program participants and more than double (222%) the number of participants served in WIOA Title I youth programs.
- Students enrolled in English language acquisition and integrated English literacy and civics education services accounted for more than half of AEFLA program participants (56%).
- AEFLA enrollment in corrections education increased by 16%.

However, the increase in enrollment cited above represents only a small fraction of the total number of U.S. adults with unmet literacy, numeracy, and digital skills development needs. Data from the Program for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) ([NCES, 2017](#)) showed that 19% of U.S. adults ages 16 to 65 scored at or below Level 1 and 33% scored at Level 2 on the assessment's six-level scale for literacy. This translates to approximately 43 million youth and adults who do not possess the foundational literacy, numeracy, and digital skills required to benefit from either postsecondary education or workforce training—precisely the adults that WIOA is intended to serve.

Adult education programs in every state have been stretched to capacity and beyond by the enrollment increases that took place in PY 2021-2022 and PY 2022-2023. Yet the need is so much greater than the capacity: 43 million in need, as opposed to just over a million served. The funding level that NCL is requesting for FY 2025—\$810 million, an 11% increase over the enacted amount for FY 2024—will allow adult education programs to begin to address the disparity between the number of adults they can serve and the number who need their services. Continued increases for subsequent fiscal years, to a total of \$1 billion, will move the federal investment closer to realizing the vision of WIOA:

To increase, for individuals in the United States, particularly those individuals with barriers to employment access to and opportunities for the employment, education, training, and support services they need to succeed in the labor market [and] to support the alignment of workforce investment, education, and economic development systems in support of a comprehensive, accessible, and high-quality workforce development system in the United States. (H.R. 803, section 1).

Thank you for considering NCL's perspective as you craft the FY 2025 appropriations bill for Labor, Health and Human Services, Education, and Related Agencies.