

Testimony to the Minnesota Senate Early Childhood Committee

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Chairperson Hottinger, Senator Clark, and committee members, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you regarding ABE services in Minnesota, and the need for adequate funding. Introduce self.

Things I will discuss: ABE Services; Demands on the service delivery system; how limited funding has created crisis; why ABE is more and more crucial to the economic health of Minnesota.

ABE Services – FY 2005 – 80,000+ students statewide in ESL, Basis Skills, Adult Diploma, GED, workplace services, and family literacy. 18% unemployed, 19% on public assistance, 10% incarcerated = the people most in need, who if not served will cost the state more in years to come. Over half of all students are refugees or immigrants – services play key role in helping them gain skills needed for employment. Cost? App. \$540/student – a bargain.

Demands on the System – Tremendous growth in immigrants/refugees; ESL hours increased 63% over past several years. Strong demand among native-born Americans for GEDs, workplace skills, due to poor economy. System asked to deliver more than is possible, with limited resources.

The System in Crisis - ABE funding has been frozen since 2003 – during this time when public demand for services has grown tremendously. ABE is forward funded – this years student hours determine funding for next year. Total hours increased 56% over past 5 years – programs stretched in every possible way to meet student needs. Funding per student hour declined greatly. Over past several years, state contact hour rate declined 19%, from \$5.72 to \$4.61, due to frozen funding.

Consortia around the state have stretched available resources as much as they can. Classes are sometimes larger than they should be, waiting lists exist in various places, Minnesotans cannot get services they need.

The Future: State demographer and Census 2000 – growth of state labor force declining rapidly, employers expect tight job market in next two decades. People will retire, must be replaced. New jobs created often require more skills – 13% of Minnesotans 25+ lack hs diploma or equivalent. Major state employers report high costs to train/retrain workers whose lack of basic skills or ability to speak English, lessens profits (MN Business Partnership). Over 255,000 foreign born pple in MN, most came since 1990. Nearly half (46%) of foreign born workers are Limited English proficient.

Both newcomers and native born residents lacking basic skills **must** be trained to fill jobs. Affects both urban areas - SP, 22% of citizens don't speak English at home – and Greater Minnesota – Pat Thomas will speak to this; 17%+ of Wilmar residents don't speak English. ABE service crucial to long-term economic health of state. If jobs being created can't be filled, they will leave the state.

The Plea: Please pass these two crucial funding requests: \$1.5 M each year for 2 years, for intensive ESL services for new arrivals; and 3% formula increase. This will help not only individuals and their families, but the entire state.

Will turn over to Pat Thomas, ABE Director, Marshall Area. Also will hear from several students, about their own experiences, what ABE means to them,

Thank you