

**Testimony Presented to the
House Appropriations Committee on K–12, School Aid and Education
Section 107 Adult Education Funding
Todd Marlatt, Director of Romulus Adult Education
April 17, 2019**

Good Afternoon! As an educator, I am electing to start off with a quiz.

If you need gas for your car, where do you go? If you need groceries for your table, where do you go? If you are sick and need a doctor, who do you call? If you are an adult learner (A.L.) in the Great State of Michigan and you want to get your high school diploma, who do you call or what do you do?

My name is Todd Marlatt, I am the Director of the Romulus Adult Education Program for Romulus Community School District. Our program provides adult education for over 200 adult learners in the city of Romulus (Gateway to the World) and surrounding areas. Romulus Adult Education is in Prosperity Region 10 which consists of 3 counties (Oakland, Macomb and Wayne) where approximately 3.9 million Michiganders reside. The Adult Learning Providers in Region 10 serve adult education students in many ways; adult basic education, high school equivalency, job training, literacy services and more. As one of the regional recipients of Section 107 funding, we are blessed to have a program in our community and would like to thank this committee. Also, thank you Mr. Chairman, Representative Aaron Miller for the giving me this opportunity to speak today.

Oogie LaMar from Kent County ISD and fellow MACAE (Michigan Association of Community and Adult Education) member along with Peter Ruark from Michigan League for Public Policy testified last week the need to serve more adult learners. I agree with the \$5 million request as a good start, however I would challenge the committee to consider adopting a long term plan that would address the estimated 900,000 adult learners that need access to programing. The adult learner (A. L.) has played an important role in our Michigan economy and culture. The adult learner has had to overcome many barriers in order to become a productive citizen. I have included three adult learner life experience essays from the Romulus Adult Education Program to give you an idea of the challenges students have and the challenges we, as providers have. In general, I

view a student who has dropped out as still having eligibility to continue their education. If they drop out at the end of their junior year, then theoretically they would have one more year left to go. I see it as not a second chance, but rather still the first time through. As a State, we are only serving 19,000 to 20,000 per year which barely matches the high school dropout rate per year. We can do better!

Michigan Document:

The People of the State of Michigan enact:

ARTICLE I STATE AID TO PUBLIC SCHOOLS, EARLY CHILDHOOD, AND ADULT EDUCATION

388.1601 Short title. Sec. 1. The act shall be known and may be cited as “the state school aid act of 1979”.

As a product of a single parent family in my early years, I was fortunate that my mom went back to finish her High School diploma after having me. I witnessed my mom attending Eastern Michigan University and I attended a few classes with her along the way. She then went on to get a graduate degree in Statistics from U of M. I spent my teenage years with my father who was an educator and coach. Although, I feel fortunate today, things could have gone bad very easily. As I learn of my adverse childhood experiences (A.C.E.) and its effects, I have a better understanding how to cope with the past. Adult Learners struggle with these experiences as noted in the student essays. Adult learners that don't have access to programs have no hope, no chance and life will be difficult. I feel that “the state school aid act of 1979” included **ADULT EDUCATION** for a reason. Power to MOMS!! Mom's rule the roost and model the expectations for their children in many single parent families.

In my 30 years of working in Adult Education, I have experienced working in different environments, cultures and economies. I have worked in rural, suburban and urban areas. I have done work in state, federal and county jails. I have seen pilot programs come and go. I have seen non-profit organization become profit organizations. I have seen adult learners with specialized certificates get a job and work it until it's over and then find out they can't get a new because they don't have a high school equivalency. Some students have reported that they were unable to advance without the high school credential. I have seen students get an unaccredited diploma and find out that they cannot

attend college. Frankly, when it comes to adult education, I feel we have had the cart before the horse for some time now. Our new slogan perhaps should be EDUCATION FIRST!!!

In conclusion, I feel \$5 million increase can assist some programs and start up some new programs. This would be a step in the right direction. However, 900,000 adult learners that need services is still an issue and the current policy is not meeting the needs. Solutions? The Romulus Adult Education program operates on love, trust and respect blueprint as students open a new chapter, a new future. I would recommend an incentive formula that would allow local school districts throughout the state to offer the adult learner the opportunity and access to complete their high school credential in order to address the 900,000 issue. Again, if you are an adult learner (A.L.) in the Great State of Michigan and you want to get your high school diploma, who do you call or where do you go?

Love, Trust and Respect

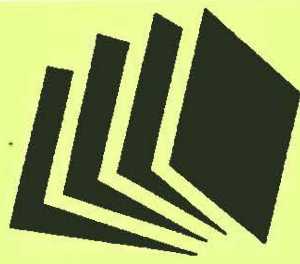
Sincerely,

Todd Marlatt

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ROMULUS ADULT EDUCATION

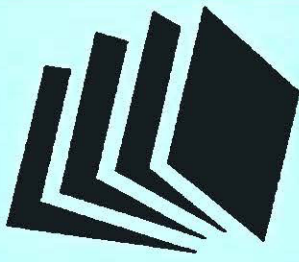
A New Chapter, A New Future

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My name is Tamieka Gaines. I am 36 years old and a resident of Romulus, Michigan. I'm a mother of 2 children, my son is 16 and daughter is 12. I was born and raised here in the states on the East side of Detroit Mi. I stand here before you holding in my possession my high school diploma as a proud graduate of Romulus Adult Education. Currently, I am attending Wayne County Community college full time where I am studying phlebotomy majoring in nursing. I have never been so proud of myself and have always been inspired to do something great, something amazing that will change the lives of people. My life circumstances altered my plans when my parents divorced and my mother was forced to become a single parent. She worked very hard to support her 4 young children as a single parent without any educational background. Just imagine how few opportunities were provided for her. During this time she struggled with severe depression. I was the second oldest and only girl of 4 children. By the age of 12, we lost our home and became homeless. My mother fell deeper into depression and had to undergo treatment. We were forced to live with family, friends, or whoever would take us in. By the time I was 14 and living with a family friend, I was provided the opportunity to work at a nearby McDonalds to help support my siblings. By the age of 16, I dropped out of high school during my 11th grade year feeling like the weight of the world was on my shoulders. This was too much of a responsibility for a young girl who was not prepared to be forced into an early adulthood. Later my mom returned home, but was living on the streets because there wasn't a home to return to after her treatment. She was on the streets alone. As a child, I watched her go through so much and then to see something incredible happen. I saw the strongest women on earth before my eyes. She would not make her circumstances her lifestyle. I saw my mother take back her life. She got off the streets and rebuilt her life by going back to school. She attended and received her High school diploma from Hazel Park Adult Education and didn't stop there. She continued on furthering

her Education at the National Institute of Technology in Southfield MI, and eventually registered at Wayne County Community College to continue her education in general studies. I was proud of her and attended all of her ceremonies. My mother was like a star to me. At that point I knew I wanted to make a change for myself, but it wasn't that easy. I had my first child at age 19 and four years later my daughter was born. I would often sign up at adult educational programs but would never complete them due to circumstances of parenting and work. Falling on hard times and feeling as though I was becoming a product of my circumstances, I grew tired and hungry for change and for success. I remembered my mother's struggles and watching her win the battle of life's barricades, I knew there was a way out. It came by changing the way I think and ignoring what was presented visually in front of me. It had to be pursued by Faith and willingness. So, I went for it. I only had one choice, and that was to change my life for my children which had become my reason to seek a better life and future. I went back to school. I walked in the doors of Romulus Adult Education and was so inspired. I was greeted by the most joyful person that assisted me with signing up right away. She encouraged me and ensured me that she would stand beside me until the day of graduation and she did as she promised, but it didn't stop there. The whole staff of this institution encouraged me day and night. The instructors were persistent and if you missed a day they would check on you. If you had a bad day they would make you smile. If you were trying to give up they pushed you. If you didn't know the answer they helped you to use your brain. I was in awe. I had never experienced what I was feeling here anywhere else. In the beginning I was told I would have a little over a year to finish but I did it in 8 months. They were like family, they are family. The Adult education program has opened doors and new opportunities for me. It gave me a second chance at life with no judgement. It gave my mother a second chance and many others like us who didn't make excuses of our circumstances but challenged them. There should be continued funding for adult education because others should have the option to make a difference in their lives too. They should be offered an opportunity. Mistakes are made in life, tragedy happens, life happens but sometimes all we need is another chance, and if another chance is not an option then we fail and to me failure was not an option. I am now a college student. Happy that I have a chance ahead of me to become whatever I want to be. What more could I hope for. My family is proud and I am an example to my children the way my mother was an example to me and

hopefully my grandchildren in the future. That is what Romulus Adult
Education did for me. Thank you for taking the time out to listen to my story.



ROMULUS ADULT EDUCATION

A New Chapter, A New Future

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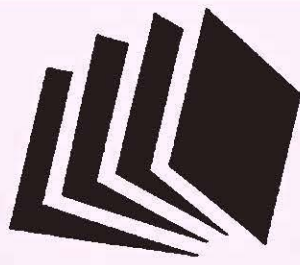
Hello, my name is Wendy G. Vivas-Gonzales and I am from Honduras, Central America. I graduated as a Bilingual Secretary in Honduras and attempted to continue my education in the university while working full time as a flight attendant. I came on vacation to United States and met my ex-husband. Life was ok but we decided to move to Michigan in the Fall 2015 to be closer to family. In the summer of 2016 I found myself separated, alone with no money, no car, no job, no home and three kids to support. My divorce was final in December 2016. I decided that I was strong enough to take care of my kids myself but to do so I understood that I needed to further my education to get better job opportunities. While working as a part-time janitor in a head start school, one night I found a flyer to advertising High School Diploma/GED completion assistance.

I met with Renae and between her, Todd, Moira and Christina who have been my mentors, I found good people who had given me encouragement and motivation that I needed when I was about to give up. I struggled trying to manage my time in a way that I could work, study and take care of my 3 kids while providing for them and getting prepared to get my citizenship. Something to understand is that having Adult Education programs provides adults opportunities we need when we experience life changing events. Adult education is not just for kids who couldn't finish school for any reason; Adult Ed is that "Light of Hope" for everyone who wants to overcome difficulties by getting further education. The sky is the limit.

Today, I am happy and excited to say that I have completed my GED, I will walk the hall with this year's grads, I got my citizenship and I have now a full time job with full benefits working as a Tax Site Coordinator helping our community by preparing free income tax preparation for low income families.

My plans are to have my own business and to become an attorney in criminal justice and immigration to continue helping our communities. I feel that I am the representation of those immigrant single parents that struggle every day to provide a better example and guidance to our kids.

If there is something that you can take out of my story today is that life can change any given moments and make you hit rock bottom but it is YOUR decision to get up again and keep going.



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Hello everyone, my name is Terri Mitchell and I'm very excited to stand before you today to share my story and what I experienced growing up as a young adult. I was raised in the City of Inkster; where I attended Inkster Public Schools. High School was a challenge for me, especially in my senior year, that's where I experienced the most degrading comment from a teacher, I was labeled a "slow learner" whenever I would ask questions or needed help with an assignment he would literally brush me off, and tell me to figure it out the best way I can, or if he saw me approaching him to ask a question, he would throw his hand up as to say go back to your seat, and that he couldn't hold up the rest of the class to help me. I believe that was the start of a deep depression for me. Being a 17 year old pregnant teenager wanting nothing less than to finish school. It was unfortunate that I had to drop out of school in my senior year because I was so ill and was considered "high risk" pregnancy. Not graduating brought a lot of conflict between my parents, and I struggled with the embarrassment of not graduating and disappointing them. My confidence level had reached a very low point, but my babies gave me joy and hope that one day I could return back to school and get my G.E.D. In 2016 my husband and I divorced which put me into a deeper depression, I felt like I just couldn't get anything right. I held close all the failures in my life. In early 2018 a good friend of mine encouraged me to pursue one of my many passions of sewing and enroll at Zaman International Boost Sewing Program under the direction of GiGi Salka. After a few months of being in the Boost Program I approached Ms. Salka about a program that could possibly help me attain my G.E.D. Mrs. Salka immediately made a phone call to Ms. Renae Gowen who is the Program Coordinator for Romulus High School Adult Education Program. After meeting with Ms. Gowen, and now attending both classes, I felt like I was on my way to something bigger than I could have ever imagined. Being able to take sewing classes and receive my G.E.D. I thought WOW!! It can't get any better and indeed it got better. After speaking with Renae she thought it could possibly be better if I would try to get my diploma instead which excited me even more, not only could I get my diploma, but I get to walk across the "stage". I feel so honored and grateful to have these two phenomenal women to choose me of what I consider to be the most exciting and once in a lifetime opportunity to represent MACAE. We need programs like this to put people such as myself back into the work force, to be productive and to boost the employment rate. MACAE has given me a second chance to shape my career path and it gives me hope and others like me in similar situations a sense of accomplishment and to know all is not lost. And we can begin again while building our confidence, to achieve goals that were just within reach but unattainable due to circumstances. This Program demonstrates how recovery of someone's lost dream can rekindle and boost self-confidence and sustainability. This is my testimony and my journey is far from over. In closing; I would like to encourage you, never ever give up on your education, and never let a person's words of discouragement define your future like I did.