

**Testimony before the Montgomery County Council
on the FY 2011 Operating Budget
By Rachel Glass, Executive Director
Montgomery Coalition for Adult English Literacy
Thursday, April 8, 2010**

President Floreen and Members of the County Council:

Good evening; my name is Rachel Glass, and I am the Executive Director of MCAEL, the Montgomery Coalition for Adult English Literacy.

Our organization has its roots in the work of this Council, and has succeeded because of your championship. On behalf of the Coalition and our Board of Directors, I want to thank you for your continued investment in MCAEL, and in our community's greatest asset: our people.

With resources, training, collaboration, and advocacy, MCAEL strengthens a vibrant, county-wide network of over 60 adult English literacy providers who collectively employ over 1,500 paid and volunteer instructors, and annually help over 20,000 adult learners improve their English literacy, language and workforce skills.

There has never been a period in our county's history when it has been more important for our community to benefit from the greater economic and social prosperity gained by developing language and literacy skills. Nevertheless, because of an administrative oversight, MCAEL is facing an unprecedented 15% cut in funding. This cut would disproportionately impact immigrant and low literacy adults and potentially increase our growing waitlist for classes – currently at over 2,000 individuals – to above 3,000.

We urge you and members of the Education Committee to please evaluate this administrative discrepancy and consider restoring a portion of MCAEL's funding. The economic impact of reduced funding actually represents a loss to our County's economy of nearly a half million dollars, based on State estimates that every \$1 invested in adult education yields a return of \$3.15 to the Maryland economy in increased wages.

This economic loss would be paralleled by further losses to our community, including:

- Fewer skilled workers available to county employers
- Fewer parents able to support their children's education and literacy development
- Fewer adults and seniors able to communicate with neighbors, medical providers, or law enforcement officials.
- Fewer adults able to obtain citizenship, which will only be a growing need with immigration reform on the horizon.

With more than 1 in 7 residents of the county identified as limited English proficient, and 11% of county adults lacking the skills to complete a basic job application or read a newspaper written at an eighth grade level, we cannot expect to grow our economy and create a prosperous Montgomery without investing in the skills of the very residents who can make that prosperity possible.

According to the Urban Institute, a fluent English-speaking immigrant can earn nearly double that of a non-English speaking worker. That's good news not only for workers who can earn more to support their families, but good news for all of us when we can benefit from those wages coming back to our local businesses and tax base.

During these unprecedented economic times, as we work together to find solutions to lift families out of the cycle of poverty, as we work to envision Montgomery County as a vibrant place to live and do business, I urge you to please continue to invest in adult English literacy as the bridge that connects individuals, families and our community to greater economic and social prosperity.

Thank you.