



Senator Rotundo  
Representative Sachs  
Members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs

RE: LD 258 An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2023, June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025

My name is Carrie Woodcock I am the parent of two children with different abilities (disabilities) and the Executive Director for Maine Parent Federation (MPF). MPF is the federally funded Parent Training and Information Center (PTI), Family to Family Health Information Center (F2FHIC) and Statewide Family Network. We assist families of children with different abilities to navigate all systems of care including Early Intervention. I am submitting this testimony neither for nor against LD 258 An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2023, June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025.\

Thank you for the request within the budget of an additional 10.5 million dollars to fund preschool programming for young children with special needs. As studies have shown intensive early intervention for young children with different abilities significantly improves the positive outcomes for these individuals.

My daughter, Sami, is 15-year-olds and has Down Syndrome. Just one week after her birth and throughout her first five years of life Sami received intensive physical, speech, occupational, and developmental therapy. Currently, she is a freshman at Thornton Academy and participates in the mainstream community. Her hopes are to graduate with her class, go to college, become a police officer, and live with her friends in an apartment. There is no doubt this level of achievement and continued aspirations is due to the early intervention Sami received.

While, we support the additional funding MPF does continue to have concerns in regards to the unmet early intervention needs within Maine. The creation of pre-school programming is important but for this programming to make an impact it needs to be properly staffed and follow IDEA's definition of Least Restrictive Environment.

MPF continues to hear from families of 3-5-year-olds about services listed on Individual Education Programming (IEP) which is going unmet. This includes waitlists for pre-school programming as well as for services such as therapies. For families who are on waitlists to get into a pre-school program this means that most if not all of the IEP is not being met. For the others waiting on a specific therapy, they may currently be in a program but unable to receive part of their IEP. In both of these instances it is the direct result of the workforce shortage and the inability to properly staff to meet the need. If we are unable to staff the additional preschool programming the 10.5 million creates, we will continue to have unmet need.

Additionally, MPF is concerned that new programming will not meet the criteria within IDEA that mandates students with different abilities (disabilities) be educated in their Least Restrictive Environment.



In Section 300.114 of IDEA it states

“(2) Each public agency must ensure that—

- (i) To the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are nondisabled; and
- (ii) Special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only if the nature or severity of the disability is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily.”

The creation of new pre-school programming which does not educate these students in their community with non-disabled peers will be a violation of LRE within IDEA.

The state of Maine recently created new pre-school programming in response to a complaint investigation ruling involving unmet need within Child Development Services (CDS) in York County. It has been recognized that CDS has had significant challenges staffing these programs and when able to staff them have not been able to maintain LRE for these students.

Additionally, MPF has concerns that funding is not being directed towards Maine’s Part C early intervention services. These are the interventions which provide services for children with different abilities (disabilities) ages birth – 3.

MPF is hearing from families within this population that they are neither receiving appropriate levels of developmental therapy (1-2 hours every 1-2 weeks) nor are they receiving any Occupational, Physical, or Speech therapy despite missed milestones and/or exhibiting regression. The developmental therapy being provided is a “coaching” model instructing the parents/caregivers on the intervention and leaving the direct intervention to the parent/caregiver. Most parents/caregivers need to work full-time jobs to meet the basic needs of their families, especially with the impact of inflation. Putting the additional responsibility of providing all the early intervention of their child on their plates is irresponsible. We also need to consider that parents have not had the years of training which is necessary to ensure fidelity of early intervention. MPF is concerned CDS has defaulted to this model as it decreases the demand for services and allows the state to reflect no unmet need in Part C.

Finally, MPF has concerns that families who worked with their Primary Pediatric Provider to identify red flags of autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and have been referred to CDS are being told by CDS that they will not be evaluated until they turn 3-years-old. Research shows that early identification of ASD and access to early intervention increases positive incomes and reduces the need for intense interventions and accommodations later in life.

It is our hopes that the State of Maine can look at the appropriation of funding to CDS and better address the current needs which are crucial to the outcomes for these children and their families.

Thank you for your consideration.  
Carrie Woodcock  
Executive Director  
Maine Parent Federation