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February 13, 2023

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 Cathy Dionne I'm the Executive Director for the Autism Society of Maine (ASM) and on behalf of the Board of Directors, we thank you for the opportunity to comment on LD 258. Our questions/comments reflect concerns shared by our membership which include 15,000 people throughout the state of Maine.

ASM is extremely grateful that money is being allocated to the 3 – 5 population for preschools. The earlier we capture children and start a program the better the outcome as these children head to public schools. The waitlist for the 3 – 5 is extremely high and we are losing precious time with them. Having options is also essential when working with this population as we know that one program may not work for all children. I hope that part of this will allow for parents to have options.

On a concerning note I am worried about the 0 – 3 children, I have seen a trend in the last 2 years and that will have irreparable consequences with this 0 – 3 population. I have received multiple calls a week for the last 6 months from parents who have a child diagnosis with autism and are with CDS 0 – 3 Part C saying that they are receiving one hour a week or in some cases one hour every other week as their early intervention. This is unacceptable, our most vulnerable population receiving a one hour a week model with the premise that parents will be implementing the intervention based on a coaching model. We have lost so much ground with this population that we are setting them up for failure and the price we pay will be at the expense of the child. Part C needs attention now and we need to rethink how we implement services and provide early intervention as soon as we can – research shows this. Don't fail our children, my child received early intervention 26 years ago and I'm happy to say he is thriving because we received 20 hours a week as a 20-month-old. Today we are not so lucky, 20 hours to 1 hour. We can do better. Thank you for your time and continued support of children with autism.

Sincerely

Cathy E. Dionne

Executive Director