



# Maine Developmental Disabilities Council

February 13, 2023

**Testimony Neither For Nor Against 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**

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, and the Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs. My name is Nancy Cronin and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Developmental Disabilities Council (DD Council)<sup>1</sup>. I am writing in Neither for Nor Against LD 258.

We fully support the additional 10.5 million dollars tasked to fund preschool programming for young children with special needs. This money is certainly needed. MDDC continues to be very concerned about the children waiting to access preschool services.

Early intervention is, without a doubt, the most promising intervention and investment a State can make. Providing young children the services that they need, as early as possible, helps mitigate or ameliorate the children's disability and prepares the children for successful educational careers. For children with Autism and other Developmental Disabilities, early intervention services may actually prevent children from needing adult long term supports. MDDC is very aware that funding the adult Developmental Disability waivers are always on your table. The first step to improving lives and reducing the need for such services is to ensure that there are effective early intervention services.

MDDC is concerned with the continuing high level of unmet needs for young children aged 3-5. We are also extremely concerned about the service model that Maine is using for very young children, children under the age of 3, which seems to not meet the need for some children,

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<sup>1</sup> Councils on Developmental Disabilities were created through the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (DD Act) in 1970. Maine's DD Council has been advocating for individuals with Developmental Disabilities (DD) for over 40 years. The DD Council is a federally-funded, independent organization with members from across the state, including persons with disabilities, family members, and representatives of public and private agencies which provide services and/or funding for services for individuals with developmental disabilities.

especially those with autism. We are concerned that Maine doesn't seem to be individualizing the services for these young children instead favoring a coaching model. Further, we are also concerned that families are hearing from educational professionals that diagnosis doesn't happen before the age of 3 and referrals are not necessarily being encouraged to seek a medical model. Young children need to be identified early for disabilities such as autism and access intensive early intervention services.

I have no doubt that the Education and Health and Human Services Committees will be hearing a great deal this session about the need for comprehensive, coordinated, effective, and efficient early intervention and education services. MDDC hopes you will keep this in mind as additional initiatives come across your desks. We hope that you will be prepared to support additional ways to improve this system so that children can get what they need and grow up to maybe not needing as much support from whoever is sitting in your seats next.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nancy Cronin', with a stylized, cursive script.

Nancy Cronin  
Executive Director