



Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, Members of the Educational and Cultural Affairs Committee

RE: LD 1309 An Act to Clarify Requirements for Payment of Tuition for Children with Disabilities by the Department of Education's Child Development Services System

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). As a point of clarification, I am intentionally using the term different abilities as opposed to disabilities to acknowledge that every individual has different abilities. 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 services with Part B-619. I am submitting this testimony in support of LD 1309 An Act to Clarify Requirements for Payment of Tuition for Children with Disabilities by the Department of Education's Child Development Services System

In Maine our Part B-619 services, Special Education for students age 3-5, are most often offered through Special Purpose Preschools. Through this model our public-school districts are not financially responsible for the specially designed instruction unlike our K-12 system.

It is well documented that our Part B-619 services currently have a large unmet need, putting our state out of compliance with IDEA Part B-619. At MPF the number of phone calls we are receiving from parents/caregivers who have been on waitlists to receive Part these services have significantly increased. Most recently these calls have been from parents/caregivers who have been on the waitlists for the entirety of their child's 3-5 eligibility and they will be aging out of the system without receiving services. They want to know who is accountable for this and how can they get what they are owed. This is an atrocity and a complete failure of our state to meet the needs of one of our most vulnerable populations.

The ability of our Part B-619 Preschools to meet the needs of these children has been handcuffed by their ability to get reimbursed for the necessary specially designed academic instruction these children need. Academic instruction that by federal regulations are not billable to Medicaid. Studies show evidence-based early intervention programming astronomically improves outcomes for children with different abilities. You have heard from many families attesting to these outcomes.

The question needs to be asked why our Department of Education is paying for Academic Specially Designed Instruction for our students K-12 but not for our students eligible for Part B-619 on MaineCare? This bill puts a model in place that allows these much-needed programs to get funding they need to provide these crucial services. It will allow programs to pay and increase their workforce and to serve more of this vulnerable population and bring our state back into IDEA compliance. Our youngest population deserve better and it is for this reason we urge the Committee to support LD 1309.

Thank you for your consideration.

Carrie Woodcock
Executive Director
Maine Parent Federation