

Honorable Members of the Legislative Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Dr. Kristy Ouellette of Litchfield, Maine, and I am honored to address you today in support of LD 2166, "An Act to Establish a Grant Program to Increase Postsecondary Educational Opportunities for Students with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities or Autism Spectrum Disorder." As both an educator and a mother of a child with autism, I have witnessed firsthand the transformative power of inclusive higher education opportunities.

Inclusive higher education is not merely a matter of accessibility; it is a fundamental human right. Every individual, regardless of ability, deserves the opportunity to pursue their dreams and aspirations through education. LD 2166 seeks to establish a grant program that will enable students with intellectual or developmental disabilities or autism spectrum disorder to access postsecondary educational opportunities that are tailored to their unique needs.

As an educator, I have seen the profound impact of inclusive education on both students with disabilities and their peers. Inclusive higher education environments foster a culture of diversity, acceptance, and mutual respect. They provide students with disabilities the chance to develop their talents, acquire valuable skills, and contribute meaningfully to society. Moreover, they enrich the educational experience for all students by promoting collaboration, empathy, and understanding.

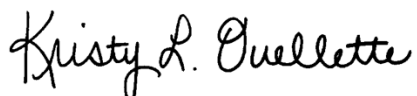
As a mother of a child who is autistic, I understand the challenges and barriers that individuals with disabilities face in pursuing higher education. Despite their potential and determination, many of these students encounter systemic obstacles that prevent them from accessing postsecondary opportunities. LD 2166 represents a crucial step towards dismantling these barriers and creating a more inclusive and equitable educational system.

Inclusive higher education is not merely about integration; it is about ensuring that students with disabilities have the same rights, privileges, experiences, benefits, and outcomes as their peers without disabilities. It is about recognizing and celebrating the diverse talents and contributions of all individuals, regardless of their differences.

I urge you to support LD 2166 and help make inclusive higher education a reality for students with intellectual or developmental disabilities or autism spectrum disorder in Maine. By investing in their future, we are not only empowering individuals but also enriching our communities and building a more inclusive society for all.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kristy L. Ouellette". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Kristy L Ouellette, PhD
Parent, Litchfield, Maine
Kristy.ouellette@gmail.com