

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

RE: 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

My name is Olivia Montoya and I am a junior in college. I am submitting this testimony 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.”

It is my firm belief that this bill would offer many educational, vocational, social and emotional benefits to students with intellectual or developmental disabilities (IDD) or autism spectrum disorder (ASD) to whom such benefits might not otherwise be available. Additionally, I believe the bill would provide enriching and fulfilling experiences to all postsecondary students involved, including those without I/DD and/or ASD.

I grew up with Sami Woodcock, who will be testifying in-person. We play board games, bake cookies, exchange birthday presents, go to Starbucks and video-call each other like anyone else. Having known Sami since she was born, I can promise that Down Syndrome does not stop her from succeeding but simply alters her course to success. In fact, knowing her has altered my own course in life, and I know many others who can say the same. I feel that I know more about myself and the world around me because I know Sami, and I know she has learned from me, too. Together we have grown as people, and will continue to do so because our relationship makes us better friends and better individuals.

Relationships between people with and without I/DD and/or ASD are so enriching for both parties; unfortunately, they are so rare because of barriers constructed needlessly before things like postsecondary education. I hope that this bill can help remove that barrier so that we may all learn from each other and grow stronger as a result.

In my experience, equal access for one person benefits everyone. The privilege of meeting and conversing with individuals with I/DD and/or ASD, including Sami, has widened my understanding of the world and enriched my perspective on what it means to be inclusive and understanding. Sami’s friendship with me has taught her about the world and herself, too. These relationships have power and students everywhere deserve to experience them. If one student with I/DD and/or ASD can go to college and make a friend, and they learn something from each other, I will consider this bill a success.

It is my hope that through this testimony, and the testimonies of others, that you will support this bill and it will serve as a stepping stone toward a more equitable and accessible future for all, in education and beyond.

Thank you for your consideration.
Olivia Montoya