



January 31, 2023

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.

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

My name is Monique Stairs and I am the Executive Director of Speaking Up For Us (SUFU). SUFU has been the self-advocacy network in Maine since 1993 and we are an established 501(c)3 non-profit. Self-Advocacy is part of the civil rights movement for people living with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) to advocate and voice their opinions on issues that are important to them. Self-advocates are the people who have the lived experience of what it means to live with a disability. Our Board of Directors is made up 100% of adults living with I/DD, which makes us a unique organization.

I am submitting this testimony on behalf of Speaking Up For Us in favor of supporting more post secondary education programs for adults who live with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities that are affordable. This bill would allow for the development of a grant program making these programs more accessible financially for people looking to pursue a post secondary education pathway.

These programs are beneficial for people living with disabilities to have the same learning and career pathway opportunities as their peers while providing robust support for individuals to learn and thrive in a college environment. SUFU Self-advocates have long spoken about the opportunities of participating in post secondary education, though many who have pursued this pathway on their own have found challenges in getting the supports necessary to be successful. Sarah Trites, a SUFU Board member shared with me that she attempted to an early version of these programs where she discovered needing extra support with organization and time management in order to be successful.

Self-advocates want the same opportunities as everyone else and by making supportive post secondary programs affordable and accessible for financial aid will open up the chance for learning to more people who live with disabilities in Maine.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony.

Sincerely,

Monique Stairs, Executive Director

