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Chairperson Rotundo, Chairperson Sachs, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, my name is Mickayla, and I live in Norway, Maine.

I am writing to you as another family who has been failed by CDS. My son will be 5 in April, and we started attempting to receive services as soon as he became 3. He has autism, needs speech, OT, and a one on one aid. In 2 years he has never received any one on one aid time, has barely had OT and gets none now, and has had inconsistent speech. As a result of not providing his necessary disability services, his behavior has deteriorated to the point he consistently needs to be picked up 3x a week from Headstart. I had to pull him from pre-school and likely will not be able to start him in Kindergarden until he is 6.

My son legally has a right to the least restrictive environment, and I know for a fact he would be perfectly fine with a 1 on 1, because I have personally watched his behavior in the daycare. I can see the dysregulation begin to happen, and if he had the services he legally has a right to, he would co-regulate with an adult and be in pre-school, and in kindergarten, just as fine as his friends.

CDS, without providing the proper aids, disturbingly keeps trying to pressure me to go through Mainecare for a special disabled children "program" instead of providing resources. I assume this is to save money on their side. They claim their lack of aids is from being unable to hire, when of course they cannot hire, they are not providing aids livable wages, especially with inflation. It is by design they cannot hire, the same as teachers in this state. My son does not deserve to be isolated in a restrictive environment when he could do perfectly fine with supports in a regular program. Not only does he have a legal right, it is important for our public schools and his peers to see that disabled people with proper supports are the same as them. If you start forcing every disabled child out of school, you are also forming adults who will isolate other disabled adults because they have no experience with anyone different than themselves. This states population is aging, and often the aging population ends up needing things such as hearing aids and mobility aids, if you have a bunch of children uncomfortable with the disabled you are going to have a far bigger crisis when no one knows how to care or interact with the aging community, that is if they aren't so uncomfortable with their communities they continue to leave.

Lastly, if morality, legality, or our state's future does not move you, maybe money will. I am a single mom on TANF. I just graduated with a BA, 3.7 GPA, and a research article I PI'd for which just got accepted for publication through a well established peer reviewed journal. I can't work or do research when I pick my son up 3x a week. Contrary to popular belief, I don't want to live like this. I am incredibly intelligent and would be an asset to my field, I likely could make decent money while being morally fulfilled. Instead I have to be stuck on TANF, SNAP, Mainecare, every resource the government provides because I cannot work only 2 days a week without getting fired. I don't have back up childcare because my family also has to work. How much money will you save from your TANF, SNAP, and Mainecare recipients when their children can go to school and they can finally work? How much tax money will you get when these children that are artificially delayed by the government's failure to provide equal access to public school can finally get an education, and end up not on disability their whole lives, but are able to get a job? Not to mention, if I can't get support for my son soon, I have done so well in my education that I have the ability to move to MA for a position. I have family here and I would rather not, but think of the investment Maine just made for me to turn around and have MA benefit.

No wonder our population is aging, look at how our children are being treated. Of course they don't want to stay here, of course young mothers want to leave as soon as

possible. By underfunding education and these programs, you are essentially doing the age old "let's buy walmart shoes instead of nice ones" and spending way more money out the back end with tons of fix purchases like glue and shoestrings and repeat purchases when everything finally falls apart. Year by year it gets worse.

CDS is failing, but how will local schools handle this? Funding is likely an issue if they are not paying aids a living wage. Something needs to be done immediately, because Maine is outside the bounds of discrimination against disabled children at this point. They do not have equal access to public education, I literally cannot put my child into school because I am being refused the resources my son needs to go to school. Absolutely reasonable resources, because other children do have them while my son does not. I do not know what the answer is, local schools or CDS, but I really need the committee to understand how the current system is stunting the growth of our communities.

Thank you for your time.
Mickayla