



Senator Rotunda, Representative Sachs, Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Committee of Appropriations and Financial Affairs and the Educational and Cultural Affairs Committee.

RE: LD 2214 An Act to Make Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds and to Change Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025

My name is Carrie Woodcock I live in Saco, I am the parent of two children with different abilities, (disabilities) and the Executive Director for Maine Parent Federation (MPF). 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 education. I am submitting this testimony neither for nor against LD 2214 An Act to Make Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds and to Change Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025.

While I have many areas of concern today, I am prioritizing for you my top two as it pertains to funding. Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) as defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) states students with disabilities should be educated within the communities which they live with their non-disabled peers. In the short time that the language in this bill has been released there has been a lot of conversation about working with Local School Advisory Units (SAU) to create regionalized programs. This would create special needs pre-k classrooms, without typically developing peers, outside of most of the student's local community. While from afar this seems to make the most sense to address funding and workforce shortages in the long term it could be more expensive for the state as we would be out of federal compliance for LRE and would jeopardize our federal funding through the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP). In addition, when students do not have exposure to typically developing peers' studies show behavioral needs increase. These students arrive in kindergarten with higher behavioral needs and supports which can be expensive for SAU's.

As an alternative we should be investing funding into expanding and improving our universal pre-k programming for placement of students with disabilities. These programs are within a student's community and easily enroll non-disabled peers. In addition, we should be monitoring all universal pre-k programs to ensure they are not rejecting students with different abilities and the percentage of students with IEPs in Kindergarten is reflective of the percentage in universal pre-k programming. This is in my opinion the easiest way for us to come into compliance both for LRE and unmet need for our 3-5-year-old students with disabilities.

There is no language in this budget to address the large amount of unmet need past, present and future in our Child Development Services system. According to a report from the Maine Department of Education 17.7% of all 3-5-year-olds who currently have IEPs have some type of unmet need. This means presently just over 800 children are not receiving any or all their services. This does not account for the unknown number of students who have transitioned into



kindergarten who had unmet need. Nor does it account for the number of 3-5-year-olds who will enter the system and have unmet need while this transition is in process. All these children are owed or will be owed compensatory services, that is made up hours of missed specially designed instruction, therapy, behavioral services, and any other service contained on their IEP. How are we as a state going to address this need now and not leave this generation behind while we look to fix the system for the next generation?

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Carrie Woodcock
Executive Director
Maine Parent Federation