

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs committee. My name is Alexandra Carey from Portland, and I am writing on my own time with respect to Maine's Child Development Services against LD345 as written.

I work as an IEP Administrator for CDS Reach in Portland. I have been involved in the field of early childhood education since 2006 and special education since 2010. Special education has played a role in my personal life as well. Having received speech and language services myself as a child and more recently my stepson having received special education services since he was around 3 years old. He is now almost 16 and is thriving with the support he has and the accommodations put in place for him.

I started my career with Child Development Services in March of 2018. I was offered the position as an ed tech. This gave me the opportunity to work closely with the classroom teachers and interact with the children. In the fall of 2018, I applied to be a case manager within Reach. By the end of 2018, I had moved into an IEP Administrator position, a position I have held since.

Since the pandemic of 2020, I have seen a significant increase in turnover across teachers, therapists, administrators, coordinators, and even leadership. We have also seen preschools close, a hiring freeze, and insufficient proper training of new teachers. I believe that because of pandemic conditions, we experienced multiple years where children did not have access to a classroom and therefore did not get the opportunity to interact with their peers, which has led to an increase in new referrals.

We are failing the most vulnerable population at a time when they need us the most. Current conditions at CDS reach require us to often tell parents that their child is eligible, but will be put on a waitlist until a provider is available. By providing additional funding to the special education services of Maine's youngest learners, we will be able to open more special education preschools, hire and train well-qualified teachers and therapists. We would also be able to provide community outreach programs for families. We work with children during their key developmental years and with your support, we can make the State of Maine the ideal model for early childhood special education. In your work, I ask for you to support these current needs of the children and understaffed workforce at CDS.