



**Testimony of Sarah Calder, MaineHealth  
in Support of the Governor's Recommended 2024 Supplemental General  
Fund Budget  
Wednesday, February 21, 2024**

Senators Rotundo and Rafferty, Representatives Sachs and Brennan, and distinguished members of both the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs and the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, I am Sarah Calder, Senior Government Affairs Director at MaineHealth, and I am here today to testify in support of Part CC of the Governor's proposed Supplemental Budget.

MaineHealth is an integrated non-profit health care system that provides the full continuum of health care services to the residents of eleven counties in Maine and one in New Hampshire. As part of our vision of "Working Together So Maine's Communities are the Healthiest in America," MaineHealth, which includes Maine Behavioral Healthcare (MBH), is committed to creating a seamless system of behavioral healthcare across Maine, coordinating hospital psychiatric care with community-based treatment services, and providing better access to behavioral healthcare through integration with primary care.

MBH also operates the Glickman Lauder Center of Excellence in Autism and Developmental Disorders, which serves individuals and their families through a continuum of care, including our Preschool and Early Intervention Program. Our preschool is a full-year, center-based program that serves 20 children with autism between the ages of 3 and 5.

Currently, our program has 38 children with autism between the ages of 3 and 5 on our waitlist. The impact of children not receiving services is profound. There are countless examples that I could share, but today, I will share with you one little boy's journey to services. He was diagnosed with autism and ADHD and found eligible for specially designed instruction or special education by a team at Child Development Services (CDS) at 3 years old. He sat on waiting lists from 3 years old to just before his 5<sup>th</sup> birthday this September when, finally, his name came to the top of our special purpose preschool program's waitlist. While he waited, his parents enrolled him in 2 different childcare settings without support so that they maintain their jobs. The childcare programs asked for help as they were unable to keep him and the other children safe, but when none was provided, they ultimately asked the child to leave their programs. This little boy understands that he had to leave due to his "naughty" behavior, which was simply a manifestation of his diagnosis. This has had a lasting impact on his sense of belong and self-esteem. When he entered our preschool, he was quite challenging, but given intensive services, he has flourished. But, imagine where he would be now, if he had these services when he was 3 and 4 years old. We can't turn back time, but we can do things better in the future. We need to invest in services during these critical years when intervention is likely to be the most effective.

Young children in Maine with autism and other special needs have very limited access to evidence-based treatment programs, and programs that offer these intensive services are incurring large losses. It was for that reason that we strongly supported LD 1309 last Session, which provided CDS funding for special purpose preschools, and we are grateful for the Legislature's support of that legislation and for the Governor's inclusion of the funding for a daily rate in her proposed Supplemental Budget.

We look forward to working with the Department on the methodology used to determine the proposed funding in the Supplemental Budget. We would also urge the Committees to consider adding the following language from LD 2120 in the Supplemental Budget to continue the current payments until the daily tuition rate is implemented:

Sec. 1. Intermediate payments. No later than the start of the 2024-2025 school year and until the daily tuition rate is implemented in accordance with the Maine Revised Statutes, Title 20-A, section 7302, subsection 2, paragraph G, the Department of Education and the Child Development Services System shall assist in maintaining education programming at special purpose private preschools by providing payments for specially designed instruction provided by each special purpose private preschool at a rate of \$125 per day, per child receiving medically necessary therapeutic services through the MaineCare program for scheduled school days in accordance with a child's individualized education plan. The Department of Education and the Child Development Services System shall make the payments for specially designed instruction provided by special purpose private preschools no later than July 1, 2024 and until the daily tuition rate in accordance with Title 20-A, section 7302, subsection 2, paragraph G is implemented.

We thank the Governor and the Legislature for recognizing that young children with autism and other significant needs in Maine deserve to have the same access to co-funding by CDS and MaineCare for special education services and treatment as older children. We look forward to working with the Department to determine the methodology used in the development of the proposed funding in the Supplemental Budget. Thank you and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.