



LD 210 An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds, and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027

**Joint Standing Committees on Appropriation and Financial Affairs & Education and Cultural Affairs
February 7, 2025
Testimony from Waypoint's Fraser Ford School in Sanford, ME**

Senator Rotondo, Senator Rafferty, Representative Gattine, Representative Murphy, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Education and Cultural Affairs. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on LD 210, the Governor's Biennial Budget, *An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds, and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027.*

As the Executive Director of Waypoint, I am writing on behalf of our dedicated staff and the children with special needs that we support each day in our special purpose private school. Children who attend our school, from age 3-10, come from a range of towns in York County and arrive with a variety of needs. They share some common traits, including the need for specialized instruction beyond the scope of a public school setting. The children whose educational needs we support require specialized instruction from educators who understand the learning needs of young children with autism or other developmental disabilities. Our early childhood teachers and education technicians undergo very specific training and instruction in order to provide a high-quality experience for the young children with special needs whose families rely on us, not only to teach their children, but to support them as well.

It's been clear for a long time that the disparity between our K-5 tuition rates and the lack of tuition for children ages 3-5 meant we had to limit our pre-k enrollment in order to ensure we could afford to pay all of our educators adequately and could afford the day-to-day fixed expenses of running a school. When we received funding in the form of a daily tuition rate last year, we were able to make thoughtful decisions to stabilize our pre-k program by increasing wages in order to retain staff and recruit good candidates, along with increasing enrollment. These go hand in hand, as we serve many children whose needs require one to one staffing in the classroom.

Maine children ages 3-5 with special needs deserve to have their educational needs met and special purpose schools and their staff need consistent, predictable tuition rates in order to best plan for the educational needs of the children who are supported. Unpredictable funding creates an unstable environment and leads to short-term decisions that ultimately undermine the intent of the administration and of the legislature, to provide reliable, quality education to our youngest Mainers.

Signed,
Jennifer Putnam, Executive Director
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