

February 27, 2025

Chairman Rafferty, Chairman Brennan, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Dr. Kristy Ouellette, and I am a resident of Litchfield, Maine. I am testifying as a parent, an educator, an advocate, and a strong supporter of L.D. 46. My son, who is currently in seventh grade, is autistic. Like many parents of children with autism, I think daily about his future—about how he will continue to learn, grow, and find his place in the world beyond high school.

Maine has made great strides in supporting students with disabilities during their K-12 education, but when high school ends, the path forward becomes far more uncertain. Postsecondary education opportunities for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities, including autism, are severely limited. Programs that provide academic enrichment, vocational training, and social development are critical in helping these students gain the skills they need to live independently and contribute meaningfully to their communities.

L.D. 46 would establish a grant program to expand these essential opportunities. By increasing access to postsecondary education, we are not only supporting individuals with disabilities—we are investing in their potential, their futures, and the overall strength of our communities.

Education should not end at high school for students like my son. He, and so many others like him, deserve the same chances to continue learning, growing, and achieving their dreams.

I urge this committee to support L.D. 46 and help ensure that students with disabilities in Maine have access to the educational opportunities they need and deserve. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Kristy Ouellette, PhD
Litchfield, Maine