

L.D. 46 An Act to Establish a Grant Program to Increase Postsecondary Educational Opportunities for Students with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities or Autism Spectrum Disorder

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and members of the Educational and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Cathy Dionne. I live in Greene; I am the parent of a 30-year-old autistic adult and a grandparent of an autistic 4-year-old. I am testifying on behalf of the Autism Society of Maine (ASM) Board of Directors as the Executive Director. I have been working in the field of Autism serving Maine families for 29 years at ASM, and the Society has been serving Maine families for 49 years.

I am here to offer testimony in support of L.D. 46 *An Act to Establish a Grant Program to Increase Postsecondary Educational Opportunities for Students with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities or Autism Spectrum Disorder*. Last session, the ASM supported comparable legislation, and the Society is grateful for the resumed attention including the intent to enact L.D. 46 as an emergency bill.

Looking back to when my son graduated in 2014, there were no opportunities for individuals with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) to go to secondary education. I believe this is something my son could have accomplished with the proper programming, and that my grandson should have the opportunity to work toward post-secondary education inclusive of such programming should he choose and/or need it. The broad standards of post-secondary inclusion outline in L.D. 46 reflect a commitment to inclusion in both post-secondary education and later experiences.

Post-secondary programming has now long been documented to statistically improve the chances of an individual with I/DD and/or ASD becoming employed.¹ Unfortunately, access to such opportunities in Maine are severely limited. We afford graduating seniors in our state two free years of community college, but that does not include access to programming for students with I/DD and/or ASD. Maine has twenty-nine accredited colleges and universities compared to one program for individuals impacted by I/DD and/or ASD. This one program through St. Joseph's College has opened the door, but the cost factor is a barrier. Without financial aid families cannot afford it. With just one program and limited access/affordability, we still have a long way to go.

This proposed legislation includes that each grant program use model requirements that meet standards consistent with a TPSID – a Comprehensive Transition and Postsecondary Program for students with

¹ [Think College](#) offers numerous resources including documentation of best practice and measured outcomes.

Intellectual Disabilities under the federal Higher Education Opportunity Act.² This is the standard that allows post-secondary students in such programs to apply for certain federal grants and work study programs. The required scholarship component further addresses access through affordability. The proposed legislation also would make possible the opportunity for dual enrollment for students 18 - 22 years old still publicly enrolled in school; allowing for maximized coordination of Individual Education Plan (IEP) transition planning to promote post-secondary success. Similarly, opportunities for braiding of funding through Vocational Rehabilitation as well as service options within the anticipated [Lifespan Waiver](#) would be enhanced by establishment of the program put forth in L.D. 46.

I urge you to pass L.D. 46 *An Act to Establish a Grant Program to Increase Postsecondary Educational Opportunities for Students with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities or Autism Spectrum Disorder*; maintaining its emergency enactment.

Sincerely,

Cathy E. Dionne, Executive Director/Parent/Grandparent

² [Title 20-EDUCATION CHAPTER 28-HIGHER EDUCATION RESOURCES AND STUDENT ASSISTANCESUBCHAPTER VII-GRADUATE AND POSTSECONDARY IMPROVEMENT PROGRAMS Part D-Programs To Provide Students With Disabilities With a Quality Higher Education](#)