

Monday March 3rd, 2025

Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs  
Cross Building, Room 208  
111 Sewall St.  
Augusta, ME 04330

**Subject:** Testimony in Support of LD 46 – An Act to Establish a Grant Program to Increase Postsecondary Educational Opportunities for Students with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities or Autism Spectrum Disorder

Dear Senator Rafferty, Senator Pierce, Representative Murphy, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Connor Archer, and on behalf of our non-profit organization, The Courageous Steps Project, I am writing to express my strong support for LD 46, An Act to Establish a Grant Program to Increase Postsecondary Educational Opportunities for Students with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities or Autism Spectrum Disorder. As a professional and individual who lives on the Autism Spectrum, I have witnessed firsthand the challenges that individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) face in accessing meaningful post-secondary education opportunities in Maine.

Currently, Maine offers graduating seniors two free years of community college, a significant initiative included in the Governor's proposed budget. However, these programs remain largely inaccessible to students with I/DD and ASD who have completed high school. With only one available post-secondary program in Maine serving this population, compared to the 29 accredited colleges and universities in the state, it is clear that we must take action to expand opportunities for these students.

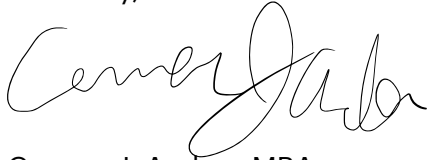
Research from Think College and other national studies demonstrate that post-secondary programming significantly increases the likelihood of employment for individuals with I/DD and ASD. Access to higher education not only fosters independence but also enhances career readiness, social inclusion, and overall quality of life. This bill will help institutions in Maine develop inclusive programs that provide essential skills and experiences for students with diverse learning needs.

Additionally, LD 46 supports dual enrollment opportunities for students aged 18-22 who are still publicly enrolled in school. This structured transition into post-secondary education will provide critical support for students as they navigate their pathways toward meaningful careers and greater independence. Moreover, the ongoing work to secure sustainable funding through Vocational Rehabilitation and the Lifespan Waiver underscores the need for initial grant funding to develop and expand these programs effectively.

By passing LD 46, Maine has the opportunity to take a significant step toward educational equity and workforce inclusion for individuals with I/DD and ASD. I urge the Committee to support this critical legislation, ensuring that all students—regardless of ability—have access to the education they deserve.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I appreciate your commitment to creating a more inclusive and accessible future for all Maine students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Connor J. Archer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Connor" being more legible than the last name "Archer".

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