

March 3rd, 2025

Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Re: 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

Chair Rafferty, Chair Murphy, and Distinguished Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee

My name is Julia Weiner, and I am currently a junior at the University of New England, where I am a proud member of the women's ice hockey team. 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, which would allow students with intellectual and developmental disabilities, like my teammate Sami, to attend college.

I would like to begin by sharing my personal experience at UNE. During my time here, I have had countless opportunities to meet new people and pursue my passions. I believe every student should have the chance to experience something similar. College has allowed me to build relationships with individuals from diverse backgrounds, each with unique ideas and life goals. Growing up on Cape Cod, an island off Massachusetts, I did not have many opportunities to meet many new people. I have found that the coastal communities of Maine share a similar dynamic. However, attending college has exposed me to a broader world, enriching my life in ways I could not have imagined.

One of the most impactful relationships I have built at UNE is with Sami. As a junior, I walked onto the women's ice hockey team and was thrilled to meet Sami after hearing so many wonderful things about her from my teammates. The moment she stepped into our locker room for the first time this season, the entire space lit up. Her smile, laughter, and presence brings joy to every single one of us. Each interaction with Sami is met with her infectious excitement, and she has a unique way of making everyone feel special and valued.

As a nursing student, my academic workload often brings significant stress and anxiety. There have been moments when I have felt overwhelmed, struggling to find joy in the things that usually bring me happiness. During those times, seeing Sami reminds me to be grateful. Her unwavering positivity and support have helped me navigate some of my most challenging days. She attends every home game, cheering us on with unmatched

enthusiasm, and even travels out of state to support us. Sami has profoundly impacted my college experience, teaching me the importance of gratitude, resilience, and genuine kindness.

I firmly believe that individuals like Sami deserve the same college opportunities as my peers and me. Everyone should have the chance to socialize, learn, and share their passions with others. I hope my testimony highlights the profound impact that inclusion can have on all individuals including those like Sami. Sami has enriched the lives of my teammates and me, and if given the opportunity to attend college, she would undoubtedly continue to spread her joy and positivity to so many more.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I urge you to support this bill, ensuring that students like Sami have access to the same transformative experiences that have shaped my college journey.

Sincerely,  
Julia Weiner  
Junior, University of New England  
Women's Ice Hockey Team