

Good morning, Chair Rafferty and Chair Murphy, and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. My name is Kelly McCarthy, and I am a senior at the University of New England, where I am a member of the women's hockey team. I am here today to voice my strong support for An Act to Establish a Grant Program to Increase Postsecondary Educational Opportunities for Students with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities or Autism Spectrum Disorder

I am originally from Rhode Island, and growing up, I had the privilege of spending time at Meeting Street, a school dedicated to supporting individuals with learning disabilities, located in Providence, RI. From a young age, I saw firsthand the challenges these students faced, but more importantly, I saw their incredible potential, determination, and passion for learning. My experiences at Meeting Street shaped my perspective and made me realize how vital it is to ensure that individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities have access to the same opportunities as everyone else.

My journey has also been shaped by my time in Maine. I attended Kents Hill School, a boarding school here in Maine, and the experiences I had in this state have been truly life-changing. The sense of community, support, and opportunity that Maine provides has played a huge role in my growth as both a student and an athlete. This state values education and inclusion, and I believe LD 46 is a perfect example of how we can continue to make Maine a leader in providing opportunities for all individuals, regardless of their abilities.

Now, as a college student and athlete, I have the honor of having Sami as a part of my team through Team IMPACT, a program that connects children with disabilities to college sports teams. Sami is not just a teammate—she is a friend, a source of joy, and a reminder of why inclusion matters. Her perseverance, positive attitude, and unwavering support for our team have had a profound impact on me and my teammates. Despite the challenges she faces, she never stops showing up with a smile, bringing energy to every moment, and teaching us what true resilience looks like. She shows up for us, and we want to show up for her.

But right now, students like Sami don't have the same opportunities we do. LD 46 is about fairness, inclusion, and opportunity—ensuring that individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities have a pathway to higher education, just like the rest of us. College is more than just academics; it's about personal growth, friendships, independence, and preparing for the future. Sami and so many others like her deserve that chance.

I urge you to support this bill because it's not just about education—it's about believing in the potential of every individual and making sure that no one is left behind simply because of their disabilities. Maine has the power to lead the way in making education more inclusive, and I hope we take that step today.

Thank you for your time and consideration.