



STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
23 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, ME 04333-0023

JANET T. MILLS
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COMMISSIONER

March 3, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Senate Chair
Representative Murphy, House Chair
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Distinguished Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee:

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 (EMERGENCY) establishes an inclusive higher education grant program in the Department of Education (DOE) to increase postsecondary educational opportunities and support employability for students with intellectual or developmental disabilities or autism spectrum disorder. This grant program would be administered by the DOE and would require reports from both the receiving institutions of higher education as well as the DOE.

The Department of Education, Department of Labor, and Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) see the great value in pilot programs to support the transition of students with intellectual and developmental disorders or autism spectrum disorders. This legislation is aimed at expanding postsecondary educational opportunities and enhancing employability opportunities by recognizing the potential of our students with intellectual and developmental disorders or autism spectrum disorders. This goal is fully supported by our Departments, though we acknowledge the budgetary environment our state is navigating.

By increasing access to postsecondary education and providing necessary funding, we not only address local workforce shortages but empower our students towards economic inclusion and self-determined lives. Further, this legislation aligns with the DOE's commitment to fostering a dynamic educational landscape that contributes to more vibrant and resilient economic communities for all of our students.

This bill outlines specific criteria by which grants are to be awarded to higher education institutions, including the parameters of the pilot programs they may develop as a result of the funding. The DOE anticipates a fiscal impact that includes grant management personnel and administrative costs.


For the Committee's awareness, DHHS, through the Office of Aging and Disability Services (OADS), oversees a range of long-term services and supports, including home and community-based services that support adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) or autism spectrum disorder (ASD) to live as independently as possible in the community. OADS and the Office of MaineCare Services (OMS) have been working, with significant stakeholder input, to develop a new Lifespan Waiver with the goal of supporting Maine people living with IDD or ASD to meet their changing needs as they transition through various stages of life. The new waiver is proposed to start enrolling eligible youth as young as fourteen (14) in 2026. Some of the services offered in the Lifespan waiver could include, based on the individual's person-centered plan, wrap-around supports while an individual attends a post-secondary or vocational training program similar to the type of program described in this bill. For further information about the Lifespan Waiver, please visit the Office of Aging and Disability Services website.

Additionally, the Maine Department of Labor, through its Vocational Rehabilitation programs, provides Pre-Employment Transition Services to students with disabilities (including IDD and Autism) ages 14 to 22. Pre-Employment Transition Services are designed to prepare students with disabilities for post-secondary education and competitive integrated employment through services such as counseling on post-secondary educational opportunities and access to work-based learning. VR counselors also support eligible youth and adults to develop Individualized Plans for Employment that may include funding for inclusive post-secondary education and training and attainment of industry recognized credentials. These training and credentials allow individuals - who historically have been marginalized in employment - to both reach their goals and to contribute meaningfully to the Maine economy.

The Departments will be available to provide additional information on LD 46 and respond to any questions during the upcoming work session.

Sincerely,

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Tracy Whitlock, Ph.D.
Special Projects for Inclusion Coordinator
Department of Education

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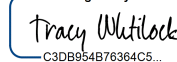
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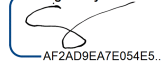
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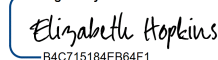
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