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March 3, 2025

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

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and members of the Education and Public Affairs Committee, my name is Cullen Ryan, and I am the Executive Director of Community Housing of Maine or CHOM. I am also the parent of a 28-year-old son with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities (ID/DD). I serve as Chair of the Maine Coalition for Housing and Quality Services, a coalition of some 4000 people, consisting primarily of parents, that focuses on housing and quality services for people with ID/DD. I also serve as chair of the Maine Developmental Services Oversight and Advisory Board (MDSOAB).

I am testifying 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.

If passed, this bill will establish a grant program available to Institutions of Higher Education (accredited colleges and universities) in Maine to create post-secondary programming and offer scholarships to students with Intellectual Developmental Disabilities (ID/DD) and/or Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Governor Mills has again included offering Maine's graduating seniors the opportunity to attend two years of community college at no cost in her proposed biennial budget. This is to be applauded; however, these programs are not accessible to students with ID/DD and/or ASD who have graduated from high school.

Currently in Maine there is only one available program for students with ID/DD and ASD despite there being 29 accredited colleges and universities. We know that post-secondary programming statistically improves the chances of a person with ID/DD and/or ASD attaining employment. Increasing opportunities for people with ID/DD to continue their education post-high school makes good sense.

There is great work being done to braid funding for sustainability through Vocational Rehabilitation as well as the Lifespan Waiver. LD 46 would assist in these endeavors.

LD 46 would importantly increase access to no-cost higher education for this population, including providing the opportunity for dual enrollment for students 18 to 22-years-old still publicly enrolled in school.

Please support Maine students with ID/DD and enact this important legislation.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.