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## Testimony in SP 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

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Madeleine DesFosses, and I am writing on behalf of the Maine Chapter, American Academy of Pediatrics (Maine AAP), a membership organization of nearly 300 pediatricians and subspecialists across the state dedicated to ensuring all Maine children are able to grow up healthy and thrive. The Maine AAP is in strong support of LD 46, which seeks to establish a grant program to expand postsecondary educational opportunities for students with intellectual or developmental disabilities (IDD) or autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

As pediatricians, our members work closely with children and adolescents with a wide range of abilities and needs. They have seen firsthand the immense potential of their pediatric patients with IDD and ASD, as well as the barriers they face in accessing meaningful postsecondary education. Like all children, those with disabilities and learning differences have hopes and dreams for their futures, which include learning, independence, and the ability to contribute to their communities in meaningful ways. However, too often, the transition from high school to adulthood is met with limited opportunities, leaving many students without the support necessary to continue learning and growing in an inclusive environment.

Research has shown youth with disabilities who pursued postsecondary education were more likely to secure competitive employment than those who did not (Wagner et al., 2005). Additionally, participation in inclusive postsecondary education programs leads to higher rates of employment and independent living among students with IDD (Grigal et al., 2018).

Unfortunately, the availability of such programs in Maine is extremely limited, leaving many families with difficult choices. LD 46 would help change that by creating a grant program to support and expand opportunities for students with IDD and ASD here in Maine. This investment is not just about education – it is about equity, economic opportunity, and ensuring that all young people have a pathway to success.

We urge you to support this bill because education is a fundamental determinant of health. The passage of LD 46 would be a critical step toward creating a more inclusive Maine – one that values and invests in all of its students.

Please vote ‘Ought to Pass’ on LD 46 and help open doors to opportunity for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities and autism spectrum disorder. Thank you for your time and commitment to Maine’s students.

Madeleine DesFosses

Advocacy and Public Health Manager, Maine AAP

## References:

Grigal, M., Hart, D., & Weir, C. (2018). *Think College National Coordinating Center: Model Transition Programs for Students with Intellectual Disabilities*.

Wagner, M., Newman, L., Cameto, R., & Levine, P. (2005). *Changes Over Time in the Early Postschool Outcomes of Youth with Disabilities: A Report of Findings from the National Longitudinal Transition Study-2 (NLTS2)*.