



Maine Developmental Disabilities Council

February 27, 2025

Dear Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs: please accept this testimony 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.

The Maine Developmental Disabilities Council (MDDC) works in partnership with people with disabilities, parents, advocates, and policy makers to promote independence, integration, and inclusion of all people with disabilities through advocacy, capacity building, and systems change throughout the state of Maine and on the national level. Under the federal Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act of 2000, MDDC is required to ensure that individuals with developmental disabilities of all ages and their families participate in the design of, and have access to, needed community services, individualized support, and other forms of assistance that promote self-determination, independence, productivity, integration, and inclusion in all facets of family and community life. **MDDC is committed to creating a Maine in which all people are valued and respected because we believe communities are stronger when everyone is included.**

There are over 300 postsecondary education programs for students with intellectual disability in the US, offering students with intellectual disabilities an opportunity to take college classes, engage in career development and independent living activities and participate in the social life of the campus. Students and families report robust outcomes, with data reporting employment rates triple those of student without that experience. <https://www.pacer.org/transition/learning-center/postsecondary/college-options.asp>

The DD Council had the opportunity to support the planning of St Joseph's inclusive postsecondary program. This was a very exciting and long-awaited development.

Despite their benefit, there is limited access to these types of programs. There is one program available in Maine for students with I/DD and ASD compared to the 29 accredited colleges and universities. We strongly support this type of opportunity being more widely available. Establishing a grant program is likely to increase postsecondary educational opportunities for students with intellectual or developmental disabilities or autism spectrum disorder. It would offer a level of parity in that Maine currently offers graduating seniors 2 free years of community college, largely not available to students with I/DD and/or ASD.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide input.

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