



# Maine Developmental Disabilities Council

March 12, 2025

Dear Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: please accept this testimony Neither For Nor Against of LD 518, Resolve, Increasing Access to Maternal and Child Health Care.

My name is Nancy Cronin and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Developmental Disabilities Council<sup>1</sup>. Universal screening is extremely important. So is providing new parents with the information that they need. We very much appreciate the department's commitment to these efforts. Our concern is with the number of programs that people can go to in order to access referrals? I spent some time on the cradleme.org website and looked at the number of programs geared specifically at providing families with links to programs.

This is what I found.

- **Cradle Me:** *"Sign up today to have a"...."contact you with information about what their services can offer your family. Then, if you choose, you can set up a time to meet in your home."* <https://www.cradleme.org/>
- **Help Me Grow:** *"free information line linking families and professionals to information"..."and resources for all Maine children up to the age of eight years old."* <https://www.cradleme.org/>
- **211:** *"free, confidential program that helps people of all ages across Maine find local services."* <https://www.cradleme.org/>
- **Access Maine:** *"free online resource guide with information to connect people living in Maine to public programs, services, and other resources."* <https://www.cradleme.org/>

Do we need to fund four programs? In addition it appears that Cradle Me is the most cumbersome. It asks folks to fill out a form and wait for a call. I have attached just the first page (there are two pages) to this testimony.

The result of CradleMe is that the family receive a phone call which might result in a referral. This sounds like an unnecessary middle man process that is extremely bureaucratic.

A few years ago this body funded the Help Me Grow program. Cradle Me already existed when this new program was funded. Help Me Grow is simple, people call, receive the referral immediately, and **then receive some care coordination to make sure the referral met their needs. That is the source I think we need to amplify.**

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<sup>1</sup> Councils on Developmental Disabilities were created through the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (DD Act) in 1970. Maine's DD Council has been advocating with and for individuals with developmental disabilities for over 50 years. The DD Council is a federally funded, independent organization with members from across the state, including persons with disabilities, family members, and representatives of public and private agencies which provide services and/or funding for services for individuals with developmental disabilities. As required in federal law, we are involved in advocacy, capacity building and systemic change activities, with the goal that individuals with developmental and other disabilities of all ages are fully included, integrated, and involved in their communities and the decisions impacting their lives.

I looked for documentation of outcomes for CradleMe. All I could find is that CradleMe helps young children be school ready. That is an assertion all of these programs might make. Which program works better? How do we know? It is critical that Maine is efficient with our efforts. I would rather this resolve be about decreasing duplication and unifying programs under one name.

CradleMe itself is just a way to provide services to families. CradleMe refers to:

- **Early Intervention for ME:** Maine's IDEA Part C early intervention program for eligible infants and toddlers with disabilities,
- **WIC Nutrition Program:** To provide supplemental nutrition for low income families,
- **MaineMOM Services:** Support to Mother's with substance abuse recovery needs,
- **Public Health Nursing:** Providing education about parenting, supporting child's development , family life, community resources, referrals, and help with breastfeeding, and
- **Maine Families Home Visiting:** Providing education about parenting, supporting child's development , family life.

I believe that there is also duplication in the services provided by home visiting and public health nursing. I have spoken to many families who received both services and were confused as to why so many people were coming in and out of the home. These two programs should also be evaluated for effectiveness and likely consolidated for efficiency.

After a clear single pathway is developed to support parents accessing information Maine must then look at how to care for children with potential disabilities in which the programs have found. What happens today? Typically, the child goes on a waitlist to be evaluated. Precious time passes before evaluations occur only for the child to then land onto another waitlist for treatment.

Maine has too many programs referring and providing new families parent education and not enough resources to evaluate and treat early children that the programs suspect and refer to evaluation and treatment. This makes no sense.

The DHHS rule Bureau of Health Division of Maternal and Child Health Chapter 272 (<https://www.maine.gov/sos/cec/rules/10/144/144c272.doc>) authorizes the Children and Youth with Special Healthcare Needs program. This is an extremely out-of-date rule. The Council does not believe that laws and rules should be just left on the books unheeded. Much of this rule is just that, not being done. But one thing that is within this rule that we think SHOULD be complied with is Section X: Developmental Evaluation Clinics.

A decade ago Maine shifted funding from the work of Children and Youth with Special Healthcare Needs away from its authorizing statute and rules. Our children with special healthcare needs are suffering from that.

But related to this bill, they are especially suffering from the loss of Developmental Evaluation Clinics. For example when a young child is referred to be evaluated the family experiences multiple evaluation processes. Because insurance only pays for one evaluation practitioner at a time families go from a Developmental Pediatrician to a Speech Therapist, to a Occupational Therapist, to a psychologist to a.... well whatever evaluator the child needs. This is over multiple days and

uncoordinated. Parents take so much time off and then receive recommendations from so many different professionals in different reports. This is inefficient and unnecessary.

The gold standard is the Developmental Evaluation Clinic where all those professionals evaluate the child at the same time and coordinate one plan of action. Our insurance system is not set up for this model so most of the old clinics have closed. Maine has only one clinic in the State, it operates at a loss and I fear the clinic may be gasping its last breath.

I suggest that this resolve be rewritten to Direct the Department to:

1. Report back to this Committee the effectiveness of referral programs with a recommendation of consolidation into just one program.
2. Report back to this Committee on the effectiveness of Home Visiting and Public Health Nursing programs aimed at these families of very young children and come back with a recommendation to utilize one program or the other.
3. Revise the rule directing Children and Youth with Special Healthcare Needs (Chapter 272) into a new draft that is reflective of current State Plan goals and evaluation needs of Maine's children. This rulemaking should be made major substantive to ensure review from this body.
4. Report back to this Committee a plan to restore the Developmental Evaluation Clinics.

I very much appreciate your time and attention to this bill. It is important that Maine DHHS provide quality, unduplicated referral, identification, evaluation, and access to appropriate treatment for young children. I am available for questions.

  
Sincerely,  
Nancy Cronin  
Maine Developmental Disabilities Council.

## Appendix A – Cradle Me Page

	<b>CradleME is a Connection to Supporting Services and Resources</b> Available to all Pregnant and/or Parenting Individuals and Families in Maine
<b>Please complete this form</b> FAX to: (207) 287-4577 * Email CradleME.MeCDC@maine.gov or Call us with questions at: 1-888-644-1130	

First and Last Name:		
Date of Birth:	Estimated Due Date:	Anticipated Discharge Date:
Relationship to Child: <input type="checkbox"/> Mom <input type="checkbox"/> Dad <input type="checkbox"/> Kin Placement <input type="checkbox"/> Guardian/ Foster/ Resource Parent		
Interpreter Needed? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No      if yes, language needed:		
Phone Number:	Other Phone or e-mail:	Ok to text? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
Mailing Address:	Town:	Zip Code:
Home Address:	Town:	Zip Code:
Parent's Health Care or Prenatal Provider Name:		Phone:
Child(s) First Last Name:	Date of Birth:	<input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> First Baby?
Child(s) First Last Name:	Date of Birth:	<input type="checkbox"/> Male <input type="checkbox"/> Female <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> First Baby?
Child's Health Care Provider Name: _____		Phone: _____
Child's Anticipated Discharge Date: _____		
<b>CradleME services and supports</b>		
If you want to receive a call or text to learn more about the services listed below, check any or all boxes:		
<input type="checkbox"/>	Public Health Nursing: Provides in person or virtual education, assessment, and breastfeeding support during your pregnancy and after birth to ensure the health of the family and infant, as well as provide coordination of care with community resources, and referrals. Our nurses are Certified Lactation Counselors.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	WIC Nutrition Program: A supplemental nutrition program for Women, Infants, and Children offering complete nutrition care, including healthy food benefits, breastfeeding support, and referrals.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Early Intervention for ME: A statewide system of early intervention services for infants and toddlers (birth through age 3) with developmental delays or diagnosed conditions that may lead to future developmental delays, and their families. Free/voluntary.	
<input type="checkbox"/>	MaineMOM Services: Pregnancy and postpartum healthcare with substance use recovery services.	
You will also receive a call or text from Maine Families Home Visiting Program. All people who are pregnant or families with a newborn can have support from the Maine Families Home Visiting Program. Maine Families Visitors can meet in-person or virtually and help with parenting, supporting your child's development, and the day-to-day challenges of family life.		
If you do not want a call or text from Maine Families, check this box: <input type="checkbox"/>		

Signature _____	Date _____	Printed Name _____
<input type="checkbox"/> Verbal Permission has been received		
<input type="checkbox"/> Family First Prevention- (OCFS use only-include ROI) Case ID _____		
REFERRING ORGANIZATION: PLEASE COMPLETE		
*Organization: _____ *Name: _____ *Phone: _____		

To Add Other Documents/Attachments [CLICK HERE](#)      Rev 11/2023