

Testimony in Support of LD 1566 An Act to Provide Compensation to Individuals with Lived Experience Serving on Advisory Boards, Commissions, Councils and Similar Groups

Date: 4/28/2025

To: The Committee On State And Local Government

Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury, and Esteemed Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony today. My name is Kristen King. I was born and raised in Augusta, ME and I currently reside in the town of Windsor. I am a 20 year State employee and a single mom raising 3 amazing young men, the youngest of which is autistic. I am here today to speak in support of LD 1566, which would require compensation for individuals who share their lived experiences to inform public policy.

For too long, individuals with lived experience have been asked to show up—to share deeply personal stories, give feedback, serve on panels, or advise on policies—with little or no compensation. Yet our perspectives are vital. They provide real-world insights that professionals and systems often overlook. This bill acknowledges a fundamental truth: Lived experience is expertise. And expertise deserves to be paid.

When my son was first diagnosed with autism I felt extremely alone. Close family and friends became distant. They didn't understand the road I was traveling, sleepless nights, lack of early intervention services, a nonverbal child, conflicting information from providers, and long waitlists. I was in a constant state of fear and worry, not knowing if the decisions I was making for my child were the right ones. I began joining different committees and boards looking for connections and community. I found others with lived experience that I could lean on and in return I shared my experiences. Those connections were vital to my mental health, especially during the first year after my son's diagnosis.

Up until recently I had never been compensated for sharing my own experiences. This past winter I was invited to attend the National Head Start Winter Leadership Institute as a Maine State Parent Ambassador. As a single working mom I would not have been able to attend had the Parent Ambassador program not compensated me for my time. The compensation allowed me to find childcare for my son during the time I was away, a cost I would not have been able to afford otherwise. Compensation made me feel valued and that my time away from my kids was seen and appreciated. They are my reason for all of this.

This bill sets a clear standard: if you are asking for our time, our insight, and our vulnerability, you must also offer fair compensation. This is not only about equity—it's about sustainability. Many of us are navigating difficult circumstances. Compensation makes it possible for us to

keep showing up, and it sends a powerful message that our knowledge is just as valuable as any professional credential.

I urge you to support LD 1566. Valuing lived experience includes valuing our time, our expertise, and our labor. This bill helps create more equitable, inclusive, and effective systems—and it starts by paying people for what they know.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Kristen King
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