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MSAD 6
LD 1098

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

I am writing to provide testimony on LD 1098: An Act to Ensure Equal Access to a Full School Day for All Students. My name is Larilee Paulino, and I am the Assistant Director of Special Education and a Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA) at MSAD 6. I appreciate the opportunity to share my perspective on this important piece of legislation.

As a Special Education Administrator and Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA), I see firsthand the incredible strength it takes for some of our students to engage in a full day of school. For students with intensive behavioral or emotional needs, even making it through an hour of learning can feel monumental. Some of our learners require carefully planned desensitization, where we gradually increase the demands of the school environment in a way that is thoughtful, data-driven, and therapeutic. A shortened school day is never a first step—it's a support, used only when necessary to promote student well-being and success.

The use of abbreviated school days in Maine is already highly regulated under MUSER. These decisions are not taken lightly. They require the development of a full re-entry plan, documentation of individualized needs, clear academic planning, and frequent IEP team meetings—every 20 school days if the student is not back to full time after 45 calendar days. Parents are key partners in this process and have procedural safeguards in place if they disagree with a team's decisions. These practices ensure that the child's access to the general curriculum and statewide assessments remains a priority, even on a shortened schedule.

From a behavioral lens, forcing a student to attend for longer than they can emotionally or behaviorally tolerate can be counterproductive and even traumatic. Just as we wouldn't expect a runner to complete a marathon without training, we shouldn't expect a student who is working on behavioral regulation to succeed without proper scaffolding and support. Abbreviated days are not an end goal—they are a bridge. They help students build stamina, confidence, and trust in the school environment.

Restricting the IEP team's ability to consider abbreviated days, or requiring written parent consent with the option for revocation at any moment, could actually undermine the very progress we are trying to support. It risks forcing IEP teams into choosing more restrictive placements—such as out-of-district programs—because the local school setting becomes unmanageable for the student.

Importantly, the suggestion that abbreviated days are being used due to lack of staffing is not the standard practice across the state, and when it does occur, it should be addressed on a case-by-case basis—not through sweeping legislation. There are already existing regulatory processes to address staff shortages and ensure students receive compensatory services as needed.

At its core, this is about individualized education. IDEA is built on the principle of tailoring supports to a child's unique needs—and sometimes, that includes providing a school day that is shorter but more impactful, allowing the student to succeed, grow, and eventually thrive in a full-day setting.

In conclusion, I urge the committee to reject this bill.

Thank you for your consideration.