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LD 2114

To the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

I am writing in strong opposition to LD 2114.

This bill is being presented as an expansion of early childhood education, but in practice it would shift three-year-olds with developmental delays and disabilities into a system that is already unable to meet the needs of older children.

I work in early childhood special education, and I can say plainly that the system is already under severe strain. Many children currently wait months just to begin speech therapy. Some children wait an entire academic year to get a specialized early childhood special education slot. Recruitment and retention of qualified staff is a constant challenge, and Child Development Services already struggles to contract with enough speech, occupational, and physical therapists because of difficult contract processes and insurance requirements.

Moving three-year-olds into public school systems does not fix these problems. It makes them worse. School districts are already dealing with widespread vacancies, unfilled special education positions, and increasing noncompliance with IEP timelines. Adding younger children to that same system will only lengthen waits and reduce access to services for the children who need them most.

For families in rural counties like Washington County, this shift is especially harmful. Districts already cannot staff or house the programs they have. Three-year-olds will be forced into long transportation routes or placed on waitlists, which is the exact opposite of what early childhood intervention is supposed to be.

Early childhood services work because they are designed to be flexible, specialized, and delivered close to home. CDS operates under federal IDEA rules that are tailored to the developmental needs of very young children. School systems are not built for that model.

LD 2114 does not expand services. It shifts responsibility and funding into a system that is already failing to meet existing needs.

If Maine wants to improve outcomes for three-year-olds, the solution is to strengthen early childhood services, not dismantle them.

I urge the committee to oppose LD 2114.

Thank you for considering my testimony.