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RSU34
LD 2175

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Kimberly Kenniston, and I am the Director of Special Education in RSU 34. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on LD 2175: Resolve, Regarding Legislative Review of Portions of Chapter 115: The Credentialing of Education Personnel, a Major Substantive Rule of the Department of Education, State Board of Education of which I submit testimony in strong support of.

I would like to thank the Maine State Board of Education for their thoughtful work and dedication in updating Chapter 115 and urge the Committee to vote to “ought to pass” on this piece of legislation.

282: Teacher of Children with Disabilities

This expansion strengthens Maine’s commitment to meeting the needs of students with disabilities and aligns with the implementation of LD 345: An Act to Transition the Responsibility for Child Find Activities and for Ensuring a Free, Appropriate Public Education for Eligible Children from the Child Development Services System to School Administrative Units.

With the transition of the FAPE service duty for children under Part B, Section 619 to local school administrative units, there is now a critical need for special education teachers to hold endorsement within the 3-5 age group to provide mandated services to children with disabilities. RSU 34 has committed to providing FAPE services for our 4-year-olds with the addition of 3-year-olds the following year. It is imperative that we can employ certified staff to address the needs of this population.

This revision appropriately recognizes that:

- School districts are now, or will be by July 1, 2028, directly responsible for ensuring FAPE for preschool-aged children with disabilities.
- Special education teachers must be credentialed to serve this age span.
- Early specialized instruction and intervention delivered through individualized education programs (IEPs) in early childhood settings promote foundational skill development and help prevent widening achievement gaps in later grades.
- Interview committees will focus on candidates with the skill sets to address the needs of the 3-5 age group as well as the appropriate certification.

Without this expansion, Maine children with disabilities under Part B, Section 619 risk not receiving mandated special education services—despite the presence of qualified and certified special education teachers ready to provide these essential supports.

283: Provider of Early Intervention/Teacher of Children with Disabilities, Birth to Age 5

This stand-alone endorsement:

- Elevates the importance of early intervention services under Part C of IDEA.
- Clearly differentiates Endorsement 283 from Endorsement 282.
- Ensures Maine’s youngest learners receive high-quality, developmentally appropriate services.
- Provides flexibility to serve children with disabilities until age five supports continuity of services and programmatic stability during a critical developmental period.

Renewal Option

Additionally, I provide strong support for the renewal option allowing current 282 certificate holders to renew under the revised age/grade span.

Further supports:

- Clarification of coursework requirements under Section 2.1,B.2.(b) and (c), and the addition of residencies, apprenticeships, and practicums as acceptable means of

meeting program requirements, recognizing the high-quality preparation these experiences provide.

- Addition of a third eligibility pathway through portfolio evaluation, which promotes inclusivity, professional growth, and flexibility—helping to address the ongoing special education teacher shortage while maintaining high standards of preparation, particularly for career changers and educators looking to transition to special education endorsement.

- Revision of (c) under the Conditional Certificate for Endorsement: Educational Technician III to Teacher of Children with Disabilities, to clarify that the applicant has been hired as a special education teacher and provides a letter from the employing school. This revision eliminates confusing language and streamlines the conditional certification process.

Consideration:

1.Consistent Language Across Endorsements for the Provision of Special Education Services. I offer this minor revision for clarity and consistency across endorsements 282, 286, 291, 292 and 515. As brought forth, Chapter 115 uses the term Pre-K for the 282, 291, 292, and 515 endorsements, yet the term Preschool for the 286 endorsement. I recommend the same terminology be used to avoid any unnecessary confusion among the endorsements.

Thank you for your consideration,
Kimberly Kenniston

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Director of Special Education