

Good afternoon, Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. We are here today representing the State Advisory Panel. Established under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), the State Advisory Panel (which is made up of parents, educators, and interested stakeholders) is charged to provide policy guidance with respect to special education and related services for children with disabilities in Maine. In that capacity, we are here today to speak in support of L.D. 98, An Act to Update the Special Education Laws.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act provides for special education up to the 22nd birthday. L.D. 98 proposes to bring Maine into alignment with that age limit. It is our understanding this proposed alignment is to bring Maine into legal compliance. Maine currently offers a Free and Appropriate Public Education up until the 22nd birthday to all students through Adult Education. L.D. 98 will assure that students with disabilities will have the same access to their Free and Appropriate Public Education as is explicitly written in the IDEA.

Through our Panel's work and membership, we are keenly aware of the importance in ensuring that all young people in Maine – including those with disabilities – exit high school ready to pursue meaningful opportunities in post-secondary education, employment, and independent living in their communities. We know that for some young people with disabilities, the option to receive special education services up to age 22 will make the difference in their ability to successfully prepare for adulthood. Currently, several initiatives are underway that will strengthen the resources available to schools to better support these transitions.

L.D. 98 also updates language, removing terms that are no longer in use and in some cases considered hurtful to people with disabilities. We support those changes. We also support of expanding the eligibility for Career and Technical Education to age 22, to match the age limit for access to special education services. This is a necessary change to ensure equity of access to Career and Technical Education opportunities for students with disabilities.

In closing, we thank you for your consideration of this information and we encourage you to support this bill.

Thank you,

Members of the IDEA State Advisory Panel

Libby Stone-Sterling, Carrie Woodcock, Christine Sullivan, Courtney Angelosante, Susan Hogan, Valerie Mattes, Howard Wright, Jim Roberts, Joy Lin, Connor Archer, Holly Day, Amelia Lyons, Colette Sullivan