

In Support of LD 1309

An Act to Clarify Requirements for Payment of Tuition for Children with Disabilities by the Department
of Education's Child Development Services System

April 13, 2023

Good afternoon, and thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of LD 1309.

My name is Joshua Lapierre. I am the parent of a child attending Dragonfly Academy.

I want to thank the representatives, the committee cosponsors, and other legislators who have spoken in support of developing an equitable payment for the critical educational services that special purpose preschools provide to hundreds of Maine's most vulnerable each year.

When my child was diagnosed with autism my wife and I learned quickly there are not a lot of programs in this state, especially in rural areas like we live in. We put our child on every waiting list, and did everything we could to make sure she got the early intervention that she needed. It took us 10 months to finally get her enrolled in the Dragonfly Academy which is the only Special Purpose Preschool in our small community that specializes in teaching children with disabilities. In the 3 months she has been attending this program she has learned so much. She has gone from non verbal to reciting the entire alphabet, counting to 28, and many animals names and the sounds they make. She sings songs, has learned to point and ask for help, and she's following more safety instructions. She says hello and goodbye, and she writes and says her name. All this and so much more in just the three months she's been there. These classes are small with just a handful of students, and each class is 3.5 hours long.

These schools and programs deserve the financial support from the State just like the district schools. The more funding they have the more teachers they can employ, which means more students can attend.

There are hundreds of children on the wait list right now that really need these Special Purpose Preschools. I feel for those parents right now fighting so hard to get their children a spot in preschools like Dragonfly. They know how important it is to get the early intervention, but their hands are tied because there's not enough Special Purpose Preschools to support all the children that are in need of this program in this state.

Maine can do better, and it needs to do better for these children and families. The kids are the future. Let's fix it where it all begins and support this bill so these preschools can have the appropriate funding to support all the families in this State.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully submitted,

Joshua Lapierre

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