

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support

of LD 2120 An Act to Fund the Delivery of Educational Services to Children with Special Needs as Required by State and Federal Law in Special Purpose Private Preschools

My name is Lee-Ann Bragdon and I live in Windsor. I am a proud " Memere" of two sweet boys, both of which currently are receiving services under IDEA parts B and C.

Channing is going to be 5 years old soon and attends Woodfords Preschool in Waterville. He started attending in September of 2023. Chan loves Woodford's! He was so

excited yesterday when we turn the corner into the Woodfords parking lot he yelled out " Staarrk". Stark is one of the many employees that work with Chan.

I am finally able to sleep at night knowing that Channing has a placement at Woodfords. It's the perfect fit for him. I remember when we first visited Woodfords Chan

rolled under the train table and hid and one of the employees got right down on the floor to talk with him. At first Channing would dive right to the floor when we dropped him off and every time one of the employees would lay right down on the floor with him. The Woodfords staff have always met Chan right where he was. He now walks right in and while often hides behind me, he no longer dives to the floor. He says goodbye to me and greets me when I pick him up. Woodfords is such a happy place. The staff all greet us with big smiles and hellos every day. Chan is always engaged in some activity when we pick him up. I have had the biggest weight lifted

off my shoulders now that he gets to attend preschool.

I have been Chan's daycare provider since birth . We all started worrying about him when he used to bang his head on the floor when he was about 13 months. As time went along we all grew more concerned. He was unable to communicate with us and he would become very frustrated if we didn't understand him. We called the Children's

Center trying to figure out what we could do to help Channing and they recommended getting a referral for CDS. We had never heard of CDS. It took 5 months for CDS to

do the referral, evaluate and identify Channing as a student who was eligible for services. I remember when Channing was diagnosed with Autism we were relieved that we finally had a path to go down.

Little did I know that CDS would become our biggest stressor over the next year and the cause of sleepless nights. We all thought they would be there to provide

services and to help Channing. The evaluation process of 5 months seemed like forever we never once thought that at the end of that process he would be waiting even

longer to get his IEP implemented after the active date of 2-2-23 for School year programming as well as ESY Summer programming. He never received any of his Special Education Classroom Services for that Academic year or for the Summer Services.

In February we contacted Childrens Center thinking Channing would be going there since he had an active IEP. Childrens center told us that "2. However, an active IEP is a requirement for classroom enrollment and it's great that he has been approved for that. I have received the referrals from CDS but they still need to provide us with his IEP. Channing is on the wait list as of 8/9/2022. There are students ahead of him on the wait list and I do not have a time frame to provide to you."

On 3-13-23 we had an IEP meeting for " unmet" we had no idea what that meant. It was to discuss that Chan was on the waiting list at Childrens Center. We asked CDS at that meeting to please look else where she said that Woodfords had a longer waiting list than Childrens and CDS did not refer Channing . I wrote to CDS again begging them to put him on waitlist elsewhere. I always like to have 3 alternate plans in my life when possible and I was so upset that they were not putting

him on other waitlists. On May 26, 2023 CDS wrote us and told us "Waitlists for special purpose classrooms like Channing needs are 10-12 months." CDS finally put Channing on the Woodfords waitlist. Thank god because I honestly don't know where he would be today.

After months of email calls, tears , sleepless nights and trying to be a special education teacher that I am not we heard back for CDS and Childrens Center. Channing had a spot at the Childrens Center and he would start September 5th 2023. We were so excited THEN On August 17 2023 we received an email from the Childrens Center stating "Unfortunately, we no longer have the opening available for Channing in our Autism program as we had a staffing change. When another opening becomes available

I will reach out to you and let you know." We were devastated we all believed that he had a spot and was going to begin school on September 5th like we had been told.

We contacted Woodfords ourselves the next day and set up a time for Chan to visit. Thank god that I begged CDS to put Channings name on their wait list in the Spring even though she told us that Woodfords had a longer waitlist than The Childrens Center at the time.

I am adopted and connected with some bio family in California & Washington Channings 2nd cousins also have been diagnosed with Autism and through out this process they were getting services while we sat at home trying to figure out what to do. Please consider supporting this bill as an emergency so that no other Families have to be put through this. Every day I think about how far ahead Channing would be had he had those services delivered to him over a year go. He is now

making eye contact with us he seems so happy and even tries to sing and dance a little. He is making the best art work. He can say sentences now and ask for help.