



**Testimony of Jeff Johnson, Executive Director, Children's Center
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***
Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
January 31, 2024

Good afternoon, Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs.

My name is Jeff Johnson and I'm a clinician and the executive director of the Children's Center. I've been a clinician and an administrator for thirty-seven years, providing services to children with special needs.

The Children's Center was founded fifty-eight years ago. Its mission is to provide early intervention services to children with special needs. Since its founding the Children's Centers have provided early intervention and special education services to thousands of children across seven Maine counties.

Three years ago, we had four locations providing early intervention services for children with special needs- Augusta, Farmington, Waterville, and Skowhegan.

On October of 2021 we closed our Waterville program. The program was full and we had waiting lists. Funding wasn't adequate and after several years of financial losses we had no choice but to close.

In August of 2022 we closed our Skowhegan early intervention program. That program was also at capacity with special needs children and it also had a waiting list. After several years of losing money the Children's Center couldn't keep it going. Funding simply wasn't adequate.

We currently provide early intervention services in Augusta and Farmington. The total numbers of three to five years olds with special needs that we could provide services to in those programs is eighty-four. At present we only provide services to twenty-seven children. We can't afford to bring in the other fifty-seven special needs kids we have room for. We currently have ninety-two children on a waiting list for those programs.



The promise of interim special education funds kept our organization open for these services this academic year, although providing services to about only one third of the number of children that need them.

Continued interim funding with a reasonable permanent rate going forward will allow us to move from twenty-seven special needs children to eighty-four at our present programs and will remove almost all children from waiting lists.

It will also support us reopening our Waterville and Skowhegan programs. Opening those programs again could result in services to an additional thirty-two children. Those communities would certainly welcome that.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jeffrey Johnson