



**The Margaret Murphy Centers for Children**  
[www.margaretmurphycenters.org](http://www.margaretmurphycenters.org)

**Testimony of Michelle Hathaway, PsyD, BCBA**

**Senior Director, The Margaret Murphy Centers for Children**

**John F. Murphy Homes, Inc.**

**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. 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*

I am Michelle Hathaway, Senior Director for the Margaret Murphy Centers for Children, operated by John F. Murphy Homes, Inc. The Margaret Murphy Centers for Children are comprised of seven Special Purpose Private Schools, serving close to two hundred and fifty children with significant educational and clinical need. Our locations, in Saco, Randolph, Lewiston and Auburn, enroll students as young as two years of age and provide greatly needed clinical and educational programming for students through the age of twenty-two. We currently have students traveling up to an hour and fifteen minutes of each location, creating a catchment area across the State that is quite extensive.

I am a very proud service provider, working with hundreds and hundreds of children and their families in my twenty nine year career. The work that I, and my colleagues alongside me provide, is simply invaluable and critical to the children of our State and I am forever grateful to have found my role in best serving them.

The work this committee did last year was significant and I continue to express my gratitude for you. After advocating for many, many years, this committee recognized the need for equitable payment for critical services that we provide, and acted to make sure these services could continue. Again, thank you for this.

I want to again thank Representative Gattine and committee co-sponsors for bringing the bill forward. This was a critical step towards re-building our much needed system of service providers.



I am here today, testifying in support of LD 2120.

As a committee, you already know the critical importance of early intervention. As a field of providers, we have given you the research, shared our testimonies, brought forth families who will tell you about the “before” and the “after” that their child has lived. We can re-iterate the long-term savings we identified when we pay for early intervention...and reap the rewards of services that are often no longer needed for a child when the early learning needs are met. I don't need to remind you of this. There is no doubt. There simply is no debate. Early intervention is federally mandated for just cause, and we don't need to re-establish this.

What I do want to reiterate today is that the State of Maine has a critical shortage of these essential, mandated services. We simply do not have the capacity to serve the children in our State who need us the most. Last year, you authorized a temporary payment that kept some programs open. Sadly, the years of advocacy and begging for adequate reimbursement had been long ignored, and we watched many of our community providers close their doors. The remaining providers were hopeful, and we held on and only last week, after months and months of promised reimbursement, finally saw this arrive.

What did this mean? We cautiously waited...and we enrolled just a small portion of our waitlist. We prepare for future expansion of pre-k services, but receive reminders that the money invested for this year may run out, and with it, our tuition payments. Our future continues to be, in many ways, just as unstable as it was when we first came to you last year. We continue to be without guarantee of longer term equitable payment and so we remain unable to fully move forward.

For MMCC, this means we opened a dozen pre-k slots across the State, not the five or six dozen needed to serve our wait list. This means that we maintain a waitlist of pre-k students and we closed our waitlist within a month of opening the waitlist. We were, and are, bombarded with calls from parents, DHHS guardians and CDS staff, seeking placements that don't currently exist.

We are knee-deep in renovations on a building in Brunswick, slated to open in August. We have a series of beautiful classrooms that will either become early intervention classrooms or elementary school classrooms- to be determined on the status of pre-k funding and our ability to financially sustain rates proposed to move forward.

We have been approached by a local provider with thirty years of operation, no longer able to sustain the business with continued uncertainty. Do we take over an existing pre-k now, knowing that a gap in funding or inadequate funding proposals may cause us to close those very same doors, or, to re-open the program with different purpose? These are the current



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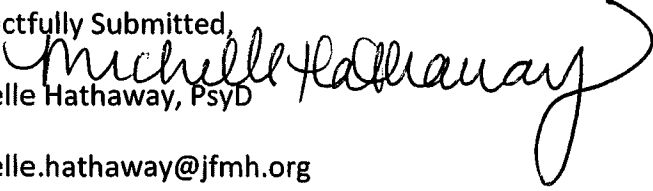
challenges we face. We simply can't make a responsible business plan with continued unknown. It would be irresponsible to our staff and to our current students.

Last year I testified that we were willing and able to expand our early intervention services. We did this with caution and reservation and to a small portion of our capacity and desire. I stand before you, again, to reiterate that we have a longstanding belief in the power of early intervention and that fundamentally, we know our kids need this. We are ready and willing to continue to rebuild the early intervention system of Maine, when we have assurances that equitable funding will continue, without interruption and with guarantee.

Please continue to advocate for the children of Maine. Please continue to invest in the service providers in your communities who are willing to meet the needs of our youngest members. Our future is determined by the decisions we make today, and I am asking you to support LD 2120.

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

Respectfully Submitted,

  
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