



WAYPOINT

The Power of Community

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

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*.

My name is Jennifer Putnam and I'm the Executive Director of Waypoint Maine, located in Sanford and serving children throughout the York County area. Our special purpose preschool, known as Fraser Ford School, has been in operation for several decades and specializes in serving children with Autism Spectrum Disorders.

I want to thank Representative Gattine and committee co-sponsors for bringing the bill forward, as well as the entire committee for taking the first step to establish an equitable payment for the critical educational services that special purpose preschools provide to hundreds of Maine's most vulnerable children each year.

An historic absence of payment from CDS for educational services for the PreK students they refer to our specialized program was addressed by last year's unanimous vote by this committee to stand up interim payments beginning July 1, 2023. With payments now forthcoming just last week, our program is initiating services to a greater number of PreK students. We expect to increase PreK enrollment by 50% over the next year and open an additional PreK classroom this winter. In addition to some much-needed facility and equipment upgrades, we also increased staff rates of pay by 15% in an effort to ensure retention and increase recruitment.

We desperately want to continue to bring students off the lengthy waitlist held by CDS of York County. I know that the promised daily rate is on the horizon. I am deeply concerned, though, and hesitate to take more families off the waitlist, for fear that delays and a lack of funding in the budget could leave us shuttering classrooms again. The intermediate payments were budgeted for just this year (and we received our first payment just last week!). The 2024-2025 school year is right around the corner. LD 2120 is needed to ensure that intermediate payments stay in place until such time as the daily rate is implemented.

Special purpose PreK programs serve the students with the most significant challenges, with most children requiring individualized instruction given their language, behavioral, adaptive, and learning needs. All children have the right to the Least Restrictive Environment from which

Waypoint

5 Dunaway Drive Sanford, ME 04073 ● P: (207) 324-7955 ● F: (207) 324-6050 ● info@waypointmaine.org

www.waypointmaine.org



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they can benefit; the students referred to a 1:1 Special Purpose Private PreK program, are in their LRE when they attend our program. Their IEP (Individual Education Program) calls for 1:1 individualized support within a specialized program. In addition to fulfilling the IEP and because we value inclusion opportunities, we stand ready to provide our PreK students with opportunities to participate with non-disabled peers. We operate a typical childcare program within our SPPK which provides students with opportunities to participate with typical peers. Our commitment to this inclusion classroom setting is strong; it does not receive any funding from CDS, however.

At a time when Maine is out of compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and hundreds of families and children are already on waitlists for specialized early education services, we cannot afford to lose well established and well-respected programs that change the lives and trajectory for children with disabilities.

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

Respectfully Submitted,
Jennifer Putnam, Executive Director
Waypoint (Fraser Ford School)

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