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January 30, 2024

Testimony of Rep. Rebecca Millett presenting

**LD 2166, An Act to Establish a Grant Program to Increase
Postsecondary Educational Opportunities for Students with
Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities or Autism Spectrum
Disorder**

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education

Good afternoon, Sen. Rafferty, Rep. Brennan and esteemed colleagues of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. My name is Rebecca Millett, and I proudly represent House District 123, Cape Elizabeth (part). I am honored to introduce LD 2166, “An Act to Establish a Grant Program to Increase Postsecondary Educational Opportunities for Students with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities or Autism Spectrum Disorder,” for your consideration.

The bill would advance a pilot project in support of “inclusive higher education,” meaning access to a program of higher education for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities and/or autism that allows for, to the greatest extent possible, the same rights, privileges, experiences, benefits and outcomes that result in college experiences similar to their peers without disabilities. The pilot program would be required to receive matching private funding. Funding would be to assist post-secondary institutions with start-up costs that would allow a student to attend an institution of higher education, pay tuition, and have access to undergraduate courses that support the student’s desired outcomes and job aspirations.

Given that Maine’s new LifeSpan waiver is in the process of being designed with a start date of 2025, it is important to begin this pilot program as soon as possible. The waiver's emphasis is on employment opportunities, and the data shows that students with I/DD and Autism who participate in college post-secondary opportunities are much more likely to be employed. The pilot program could constructively inform the design of the LifeSpan waiver to likely include access to post-secondary educational programs. In addition, we just extended eligibility to the

age of 22 for students in our public schools. The programming that is coming out of that extended eligibility, unfortunately, is looking a lot like self-contained programs with only life skills and no access to typically developing peers. Programming on a college campus encourages independent living skills with typically developing peers within the same age range.

There are 300+ inclusive programs around the country, and regrettably, none are in Maine. This is a great [quick overview](#) of why inclusive education is impactful. You can view this [slideshow](#) with an analysis. Fifty nine percent of the students find competitive integrated employment one year after leaving college. Students with intellectual or developmental disabilities are achieving their college goals when provided with access and high expectations. College provides the opportunity for students to explore, become more independent, and prepare for a bright future.

Thank you for your consideration