



Maine Developmental Disabilities Council

January 29, 2024

Testimony in **Support** of 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.

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and the distinguished members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

My name is Rachel Dyer, and I am the associate director of the Maine Developmental Disabilities Council. Councils on Developmental Disabilities were created through the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (DD Act) in 1970. Maine's DD Council has been advocating for individuals with developmental disabilities for nearly 50 years. The DD Council is a federally funded, independent organization with members from across the state, including persons with disabilities, family members, and representatives of public and private agencies which provide services and/or funding for services for individuals with developmental disabilities. As required in federal law, we are involved in advocacy, capacity building and systemic change activities, with the goal that individuals with developmental and other disabilities of all ages are fully included, integrated, and involved in their communities and the decisions impacting their lives.

There are over 300 postsecondary education programs for students with intellectual disability in the US and offering students with intellectual disabilities an opportunity to take college classes, engage in career development and independent living activities and participate in the social life of the campus. Students and families report robust outcomes, with data reporting employment rates triple those of student without that experience.

<https://www.pacer.org/transition/learning-center/postsecondary/college-options.asp>

The DD Council had the opportunity to support the planning of St Joseph's inclusive higher education program. This was a very exciting and long-awaited development. We strongly support this type of opportunity being more widely available.

Despite their benefit, there is limited access to these types of programs. Some of this is related to awareness and expectations but is largely related to financial barriers. These can be mitigated somewhat when services that youth already receive can be applied to or delivered in a postsecondary environment.

LD2166 encourages other institutions of higher education to develop and implement pilot programs that offer students with intellectual or developmental disabilities or autism spectrum disorder access to an postsecondary education. It also provides for scholarships to increase individual access to students participating pilot programs. These programs have to potential for outcomes that benefit communities, as well as individuals.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide input.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Reed O.", located in the lower right quadrant of the page.