



Woodfords FAMILY SERVICES

**Testimony of Mark Eves
In support of Part CC**

**LD 2214 An Act to Make Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and to Change Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025
Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs
February 21, 2024**

Good afternoon, Senator Rotundo, Senator Rafferty, Representative Sachs, Representative Brennan and esteemed members of both the Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Education and Cultural Affairs Committees.

My name is Mark Eves. I am the Executive Director of Woodfords Family Services. I am testifying in support of LD 2214 and specifically in support of Part CC which appropriates funding for Special Purpose Preschools to continue to receive a daily tuition payment for educational services provided. I also want to thank the Governor and the Department of Education for including this critical funding in the supplemental budget.

Woodfords is a nonprofit organization committed to the support and inclusion of individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities and their families. As part of our mission we have been providing early intervention services to children for several decades, in fact Woodfords started as a school in 1967. We currently have 3 Special Purpose Preschools in Westbrook, Waterville, and New Gloucester on the Pineland campus, and we are hoping to add a fourth just down the road in Manchester if we can establish a permanent and predictable funding source, which is included in this budget.

Woodfords, along with a coalition of providers and families, advocated for a \$15 million appropriation which you included in the final budget. The result has allowed us to keep our doors open and serve more children.

The impact of your leadership on this issue last session has been profound for us and children waiting for services.

Five years ago, Woodfords was one of the larger providers of specialized preschool services in the state. We served 140 children across three schools. After years of significant financial losses that threatened the viability of the entire agency, we made the difficult decision to drastically limit enrollment, and no longer take new admissions. We sent a letter to the Commissioner of Education informing the state of our intention to close

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the program in 2024 unless there was a change in the state funding structure. We closed our waitlist of more than 100 families. Our census dwindled to just 35 children. It was heartbreaking and hard to do, but we had no other choice.

After the budget was passed last year, we immediately changed course. We reopened admissions and increased our capacity by 89%. We called families who had previously been on our wait list, invited them to tour the program, and enrolled their children in services. We currently serve 50 children and with continued funding our goal is to double that to 100, getting back to the numbers we had previously served.

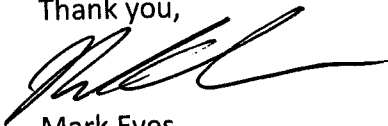
In addition to saving our schools and allowing us to serve more children, we also stabilized our workforce. We gave teachers and support staff a 25% wage increases. Applications for open positions more than tripled and we have been steadily bringing on new staff to support newly enrolled students since the start of the school year in September.

The story here is that the strategy is working AND we have a long way to go. Our new waitlist already has 77 children on it.

Funding included in the supplemental budget will ensure that we can continue to rebuild and provide critical early intervention services. Providers like Woodfords need long-term, consistent funding to stabilize and expand programs for some of the most vulnerable children.

Thank you for supporting our advocacy last session, and I urge you to continue to support this effort on behalf of hundreds of children and families across the state.

Thank you,



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