

Representative Brennan, Senator Rafferty, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Claudia Fournier-Bourgoin, and I live in Aroostook County.

My daughter, age 4, has had an IEP since she was 1 year old. She has been diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), Mixed receptive-expressive language disorder, Global developmental delay, Attention Deficit and Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), sensory processing difficulty, and she has recently outgrown a diagnosis of Headbanging.

Over the course of 1.5 years, I have been advocating with CDS to put Autism on her IEP as the primary category for her need in special education. They had only put Speech as the category on her IEP for her entire third year of early education. Since she was diagnosed with Autism, I have been requesting that the change be made and this took several meetings to convince the CDS team that this was the primary reason my daughter needed supports at school. In addition, I had also been advocating for her to receive additional staffing supports because of her high needs behaviors she displays at school, but when I advocated for her to receive a one to one ratio of staff, CDS delayed this change by requiring very specific and hard to obtain BCBA staff to observe her in her setting. The first referral that was submitted for this specialty staff was not successful, due to there being no BCBA staff available in the area. When this was discovered at the next IEP meeting, CDS submitted a new referral for this to occur, all while my child still continued to go without the needed staffing that both myself and the school teacher saw that she needed. This need for staffing extended from year three straight through summer school and into year four and even though they just recently (in February) approved a one to one ratio, she continues to go without the staffing for this.

In February, the IEP met to review, once again, my daughter's need for additional support. The conversation was difficult to make CDS understand the severity of the

need and it took much convincing to get them to give her the support she desperately needs in her IEP. Throughout this process, the CDS team refused to make changes to her plan without getting more data from the BCBA. They wanted all of these scores and data from the BCBA, but the BCBA was unavailable for a long time which held up this process. All along, the teachers, who work with my child every day, have been reporting notes and letting parent know that they need more support and my child needs more assistance than they can currently give her at a 3:1 staffing ratio. The teacher's data did not seem to mean anything to CDS and instead they kept insisting that they needed other data before making changes.

During year 4 of school, she missed an entire month due to no placement being available at her original school. This caused her to be placed in another local early education program with no transportation available. Since she started at this program, the teachers have been requesting additional assistance due to the high amount of attention she needs throughout the day. CDS told the teachers that the parents must request more help and when speaking with CDS, they told the parents that the teachers must make the request.

Planning for this coming school year (year 5), there is no special education Pre-k program at our local public school and she will need to be displaced once more to attend a foundation class at the ACAP program. She will only be able to attend her local public school once she enters her Kindergarten year, where she will have access to the special education that she needs and can no longer wait for.

Moving forward, it is urgent to come up with a new plan for our children ages 3-5 as they are at their peak in developmental growth and if no action is made to change the deficits in the Department of Education system, it may set up our children for failure. I have noted that these problems have been especially difficult in Aroostook County.

Please take time to consider these above mentioned statements as these changes will greatly benefit our future generations.

Thank you for your attention.

