



Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Educational and Cultural Affairs Committee.

RE: LD 345 An Act Regarding Educational Policies and Programs !

My name is Carrie Woodcock I live in Saco, I am the parent of two children with different abilities, (disabilities) and the Executive Director for Maine Parent Federation (MPF). MPF is the federally funded Parent Training and Information Center (PTI), Family to Family Health Information Center (F2FHIC) and Statewide Family Network. We assist families of children with different abilities to navigate all systems of care including education. MPF is submitting this testimony neither for nor against LD 345 An Act Regarding Educational Policies and Programs. !

While MPF is testifying neither for nor against today, we are in support of moving the provision of a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) for 3-5-year-olds who qualify for Part-B 619 to local School Administrative Units (SAU). We believe the system is so broken that currently this is the best next steps to properly serve this vulnerable population at a crucial time of development in their lives.

Despite this legislation, two areas of concern remain as we believe we will still be at risk of being out of federal compliance in ensuring FAPE in a Least Restrictive Environment (LRE) and unmet need for past, present and future children.

As defined by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) students with different abilities should be educated within the communities they reside, with non-disabled peers. We are concerned that to serve 3-5-year-olds with Individualized Education Programs (IEP) SAUs will look to regionalize Part B 619 Pre-K programs. From the surface this model seems to make the most sense to address funding and workforce challenges. However, a program created by multiple SAUs for 3-5-year-olds with IEPs which does not include non-disabled peers and are located outside of the student's local community would not be considered LRE. These programs would still be out of federal compliance for LRE and would jeopardize our federal funding through the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP).

Two alternatives to regionalized programming would be regionalized services through the newly created Service Hubs and aggressively expanding and improving our universal pre-k programming. Memorandums of understanding between the Service Hubs and SAUs can provide services included on an IEP so that the service comes to the child in their natural environments with non-disabled peers. Universal Pre-K programs are within a student's community and easily enroll non-disabled peers. These programs should be monitored to ensure they are not rejecting students with different abilities and the percentage of students with IEPs in Kindergarten is reflective of the percentage in the universal pre-k.

There is no language in this bill to address the large amount of unmet need past, present and future in our Child Development Services system. Unmet need and waitlists are two different areas where we are currently out of compliance. All children who are on a waitlist for a placement in a Pre-k program have that need not being unmet. Likewise, children who are not on a waitlist and are simply being told there are no providers for the services listed on their IEP



additionally have unmet need. Therefore, the unmet need number is higher than the waitlist numbers and both are a serious compliance issue. According to a report from the Maine Department of Education 17.7% of all 3-5-year-olds who currently have IEPs have some type of unmet need, this does not account for children who have already transitioned into kindergarten nor the number of children who will enter the system during this transition. All these children are owed or will be owed compensatory services, hours of missed services on their IEP. Who is responsible for these services? Will compensatory services which happened under CDS transfer to the SAU? How are we as a state going to address this need now and not leave this generation behind while we look to fix the system for the next generation?

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Carrie Woodcock
Executive Director
Maine Parent Federation