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Re: **Testimony in Support of LD 345** : An Act Regarding Educational Policies and Programs

To Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee Education and Cultural Affairs,

My name is Kathy Hamblen, Director of Special Services for the Gorham School District and current President of MADSEC. I am providing testimony in support of LD 345 with several suggestions for consideration.

LD 345 recognizes that our Child Development Services Program for 3-5 year old's is not working for our students. Too many of these students are not receiving the services they require due to lack of service providers across the state and a convoluted system. As we all know, there is extensive research on the importance of early intervention services for children with disabilities. My district is feeling firsthand the lack of services for many of our students prior to Kindergarten as the readiness skills of our Kindergartners are severely lacking and our Kindergartners with special services are not moving through their services in a way that was normally expected and are accumulating more significant resources.

LD 345 offers solutions to resolve these concerns, for which I am very appreciative. As my colleagues from MADSEC have and will share, there are many aspects of this bill that we value and are necessary for the positive transition of responsibility of 3-5 year old's to SAU's, such as the option for parents to choose Extended Part C, optional supports for SAU's through CDS hubs, and a multi-year readiness/preparation period for SAU's to prepare their districts to assume responsibility. I do have several concerns that I hope you will take into consideration with this bill:

- CDS shall assume responsibility for any and all compensatory education during the time period in which the agency (CDS) was responsible for the provision of child find and FAPE for children ages 3-5, including the first year of transition to the SAU
  - Taking on FAPE means taking on the legal responsibility and this would help ease financial burden and worries that SAU's have about taking on this responsibility
- As part of the transition of responsibility for ensuring FAPE in the LRE for children eligible under IDEA Part B Section 619 from CDS to SAUs, direct the State Board engage in rulemaking for Chapter 115, Part II 282 endorsement to expand from Kindergarten to Pre-Kindergarten to ensure the provision of FAPE services to children eligible under Part B Section 619
- Consideration for the pilot year to allow districts to assume FAPE for 4-year old's only and then phase in the 3-year old's the year after
- While it has been discussed that the CDS hubs could possibly assist districts in billing for Mainecare, I would ask that the MDOE take this opportunity to work with DHHS to develop regional Mainecare Billing Hubs that would assist schools for ages 3-22 Mainecare Billing

As many of our Special Education Directors will share with you, we are very much in support of this bill and having SAU's take on FAPE responsibilities for 3-5 year old's. These students are part of our communities and having them under our community umbrella allows us to better plan for their transition to elementary school and we feel confident that we will be better able to meet the regulatory and service needs under our current SAU systems than the current convoluted CDS system is able to do. I do note that SAU's do still have unanswered

questions and concerns, but I feel that this bill does have flexible language and planning that will allow for SAU's to work with the MDOE to determine best models.

I have been hearing about this move of 3-5 year old's to SAU's for the 16 years I have been a Special Education Administrator. Many resources have been committed over the years to try to make the current CDS service program work and the CDS staff have worked incredibly hard throughout these past few years to implement changes and find ways to support all the needs of all their students, but the amount of 3-5 year old's not getting the services they need has continued to increase. We now need to make this change so we can provide for those unmet needs for early intervention that will hopefully decrease the amount of special services students need later on in elementary school.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am available for any questions that you may have.