



Testimony of Jeffrey Johnson, Executive Director, Children's Center,
Augusta, Farmington, Skowhegan

LD210 An act making unified appropriations and allocations for the expenditures of state government, general fund and other funds, and changing certain provisions of the law necessary to the proper operation of state government for the fiscal years ending June 30, 2025, 2026 and 2027.

Joint standing committee on appropriation and financial affairs and education and cultural affairs-

February 7, 2025

Good day Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine, Representative Murphy and esteemed members of the joint standing committees on appropriations and financial affairs and education and cultural affairs. I appreciate the opportunity to testify on LD210, the Governor's biennial budget for fiscal years 2025, 2026 and 2027.

My name is Jeff Johnson, and I am the Executive Director of the Children's Center.

We're a small non-profit that provides special education to 3- to 5-year-old special needs children in central Maine. These pre-school programs are located in Augusta, Farmington and Skowhegan. Typical children referred to us by CDS are not typical – they have big challenges with behaviors, managing their emotions, often have no functional way to communicate, have gross and fine motor delays, many have complicated medical problems as well as acutely traumatic abuse histories.

Two years ago, Children's Center was in the process of doing two things – telling the story of our children to you folks in hopes of securing payment for special education services. We simultaneously were shutting down our programs because we couldn't afford them anymore.

You listened, and special education funding was provided for these children. Our payments are based on cost reports coordinated by the Department of Education (DOE). We get paid what we need and no more – as it should be. Thanks for that support. Because of it, the pendulum changed direction, and we opened programs that had been shut down and increased the capacity of programs where we cut numbers.



Children's Center 1 Alden Avenue Augusta ME 04330
(207) 626-3497 1-800-894-6264 Fax: (207) 621-6211 TTY: (207) 621-6395
www.childrenscenter.org





We started to bill for special education services for these kids in November 2023. We had 23 kids then, a result of us downsizing and closing programs.

Fast forward to February 2025, with funding in place, we now have 47 3- to 5-year-old children receiving services. This funding is directly responsible for a 100% increase in children receiving services. We have the capacity for 87 children. Over the next year, with this funding in place, our goal is to have no waiting list and have 87 children in our programs.

Without this funding we know how the story ends. Children won't get services. Programs will close, capacity in the system will collapse. We've seen it just two years ago.

Thank you for your ongoing support. I appreciate very much the advocacy and understanding you've shown to these very special, special needs children.



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