

Joint Standing Committees on Appropriation and Financial Affairs Committee & Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

February 7, 2025

Senator Rotondo, Senator Rafferty, Representative Gattine, Representative Murphy, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committees on Appropriations and Financial Affairs and Education and Cultural Affairs. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the Governor's Biennial Budget. I am testifying to encourage the continued tuition funding for Special Purpose Preschools like the one my son attends.

My name is Caroline Dyer, I am the mother of a child with a rare genetic condition who attends preschool at Woodfords Family Services, his name is Acer. As a parent of a child with a rare condition, I have always been aware of how crucial it is to provide a supportive and nurturing environment for Acer's development. I was initially uncertain if a traditional educational setting would be the right fit given his unique needs. However, I can confidently say enrolling Acer at Woodfords has proven to be one of the best decisions we've made.

Woodfords has provided Acer with more than just early education, it has given him the opportunity to interact with peers, learn vital personal skills and experience a sense of normalcy. For a child with a condition like Acer's, these opportunities are very hard to come by. Woodfords helps bridge the gaps, offering support that respects Acer's needs while challenging him to grow.

The teachers and staff have been incredibly understanding and flexible, they often work closely with Acer's healthcare team to ensure he receives all the accommodations he needs. In the last year Acer has gotten access to a walker to support his independent steps, and an adaptive stroller to help longer journeys easier on us. They've created an environment where Acer feels safe, understood and encourages to engage in activities at his pace. The structure and routine that Woodfords preschool program provides have helped him develop life skills that benefit him far beyond the classroom setting.

Most importantly, Woodfords has given Acer the chance to build confidence. It is easy to feel isolated and different when your child has a genetic condition, but at Woodfords he is seen as just another child-unique, yes, but full of potential. The bonds he has formed, the self-esteem he has built, and the joy he gets to experience everyday in this setting is invaluable.

For any parent of a child with special needs, I cannot stress enough the importance of finding a preschool that is willing to embrace your child's individuality, we have gotten so lucky with Woodfords. It's not just about education; it's about fostering a love of learning, creating connections, and offering your child with the best possible start to a life with opportunities. Woodfords has been a crucial step in ensuring Acer's future, and I will forever be grateful for the experience they have provided.

Losing a program like this would likely lead to a loss of skills that Acer has worked so hard to gain in the last two years. He would no longer have that structure and support he is thriving with now. As a family we would lose the support of having a team behind us to help guide us in best steps to take to ensure Acer is on track to live up to his potential. As a mother, the thought of Acer not having every possible chance to live the life he deserves is devastating.

Thank you for your time and consideration to this important matter.