

Senator Rotundo, Representative Gattine and members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs. Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs committee. My name is Dianne Rowe and I am an IEP administrator for Child Development Services. I also serve as the elected President of the Child Development Services chapter of my union, MSEA-SEIU Local 1989.

I am an Oxford Hills resident with a long history of being involved with special needs children. As a 12+ year CDS employee, dedicated to the crucial early childhood education and intervention work for Maine's children with physical and developmental disabilities. I can say with strong conviction, that our system in delivering early intervention education is severely challenged due to a lack of resources from the Department of Education and the Maine State Legislature.

For years, my office has faced continuous staffing challenges, this has been a statewide problem for too long. We have very large waitlists for the children in need of our services. CDS is struggling to locate certified teachers and ed-techs due to the low pay offered by CDS. One reason we are suffering in staffing is because our wages are significantly lower than wages offered at public schools. We are qualified, educated, experienced, and passionately dedicated to make the lives of these kids better. We work to equip them with the skills to succeed in school and live happy independent lives. We have so many success stories due to our dedicated staff – but the low-pay and staffing challenges are painful for us. Low pay is curbing our potential to reach more kids and our ability to have more success stories in early intervention.

Early intervention done right, by funding our services properly, would save the State of Maine millions in special education costs by significantly reducing the need for services as children get older.

My older brother was born without eyes, and never functioned beyond the level of a 12-month-old. I remember visiting placement facilities for him when I was young, back then there was no CDS. I often wonder what his life would have been like if he had an organization like CDS to provide him the services he needed. This was 60+ years ago. I am proud of the work CDS does. I know and believe that given the support, funding and proper management, we could be the best State at providing special education services instead of one of the worst.

CDS has been poorly managed and set up to fail. For years our teachers' starting salary was roughly 15k less than the lowest paid teacher in Maine. Our Ed Techs leave to make more money with jobs that do not provide the same level of value for our communities. With your leadership, Maine can do better.

CDS could be the gold standard other States strive to be. Early intervention done right would save the State of Maine millions in special education costs by significantly reducing the need for services as children get older. Your decisions in crafting this two-year budget can help us carry out our mission in making Maine a better place, especially for those children who have a right to our services but are forced to wait.

Thank you for your time. I would like to say that I am more than willing to answer questions if there are any.