



Kelly Noonan Murphy

5 Woodfield Drive

Scarborough, ME 04074

Phone: (207) 318-3215

Kelly.murphy@legislature.maine.gov

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

2 STATE HOUSE STATION

AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002

(207) 287-1400

TTY: MAINE RELAY 711

March 3, 2025

Testimony of Rep. Kelly Noonan Murphy introducing
LD 46, An Act to Establish a Grant Program to Increase Postsecondary Educational Opportunities for Students with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities or Autism Spectrum Disorder
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Good morning, Senator Rafferty and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Kelly Murphy and I represent House District 125 in Scarborough. Thank you for the opportunity to introduce LD 46, **An Act to Establish a Grant Program to Increase Postsecondary Educational Opportunities for Students with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities or Autism Spectrum Disorder**.

The work for this bill began in the 131st Legislature with LD 2166 sponsored by the honorable Rebecca Millet. LD 2166 had a unanimous ought-to-pass report out of committee and sailed through both the House and Senate. Like my colleague's proposal from the last session, this bill would establish a grant program within our state's Department of Education to increase secondary educational opportunities and to support employment opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities or who have autism spectrum disorder.

While LD 2166 didn't receive funding last year, I have high hopes that the 132nd will move this all the way to the governor's desk. Across the country, there are over 300 existing postsecondary education programs for students with intellectual disabilities or who are on the autism spectrum. Saint Joseph's College offers a 2 year certificate program that allows students to audit classes, but because the Integrated Studies Program doesn't result in a degree, loans are not available through the FAFSA. At \$50,000 per year (including tuition, fees and room and board) the cost of attendance is a barrier for many families.

Although a current fiscal note is not yet available for this bill, the ongoing cost after the first year is relatively minimal once the program is up and running. Additional financial support may also be available through the Department of Labor's Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and proposed language in DHHS's new LifeSpan Waiver.

For so many students with intellectual disabilities or who are on the autism spectrum, formal education most often ends with their high school diploma. This proposed legislation could change that and align Maine with the educational opportunities already being offered in other states. Establishing this grant program will provide scholarship opportunities for students of all abilities. When we provide greater access to more educational opportunities, all of Maine thrives.

This bill would help us to create an inclusive education system PreK-16 by providing the same educational opportunities to Mainers with intellectual disabilities that are already provided to their peers.

Everyone on this committee understands that when our students thrive, we all thrive. Education is the backbone of our state, and providing more access to those who want to participate in higher education will have long-term benefits for the individual and will yield a positive impact on communities all across the state.

It has been my honor to present this measure, and I am happy to answer any questions the committee may have.