

Written Testimony of Katherine R. Worden of Portland, Maine

Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, March 3, 2025

LD46 - An Act to Establish a Grant Program to Increase Postsecondary Educational Opportunities for Students with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities or Autism Spectrum Disorder

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Katherine Worden. Thank you for the opportunity to share my support for this bill.

I'm a Senior at Deering High School, a three-sport athlete, Vice President of the Best Buddies chapter at Deering High School, a Best Buddies State of Maine Ambassador, and working toward becoming a Best Buddies Global Ambassador.

I work two jobs and volunteer at my church. I'm also a finalist for the VUnited Scholars program at Villanova University in Pennsylvania. Letters of acceptance are expected to be released March 17th and I'm hoping to be one of ten lucky students chosen to attend this well-established Inclusive Post Secondary Education program.

My reason for being here today is to share why I feel all students, regardless of abilities, should have the opportunity to pursue higher education and experience college life.

The Benefits of Inclusion for Students With Disabilities Include:

- Students who complete a post secondary program have a 59% employment rate upon graduation. This is nearly 3 times the employment rate of those students who do not attend a program
- Graduates earn more per month on average, requiring less Social Security benefits per month
- 99% of wages reported were paid above federal minimum wage
- Peer models help us achieve academic and social goals, we build relationships and increased networks
- And, Most importantly, we acquire independence skills

The Benefits of Inclusion for Students Without Disabilities Include:

- The ability to build important and meaningful friendships, learning respect for all
- Appreciation and acceptance of diversity
- Prepares all students for adult life in an inclusive society
- And, provides opportunities to master their skills by practicing and teaching others

We need your help to provide opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities to attend college. By offering IPSE programs in Maine, more people like myself will have opportunities for growth, learning and independence.

Thank you for your time.