

Dear Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to give testimony. My name is Dylan Sullivan. I am the Neurodiversity Liaison and Student Success Specialist for the University of Maine at Augusta (UMA). I am grateful to say I am working here in Augusta to support the recently developed Neurodiversity Initiative at UMA. They have committed themselves to creating an educational environment that meets the unique needs of neurodivergent students. Right down the road we are developing curriculum that uses inclusive teaching practices, offers one-on-one support tailored to neurodivergent students, and more. This Act has the potential to broaden and ensure the success of our goals, so we may then serve as a blueprint to the other institutions encouraged to begin their own initiatives seeking funding from this grant.

However, I would also like to talk about before I started working at UMA, because I am one of the students this proposed legislation refers to. After graduating from high school in southern Maine I attended the University of Maine. By the end of my first year I was burnt out - feeling guilty for having a learning disability and endlessly fighting for the support I needed, I decided to withdraw. Thankfully, with the support of my parents I was able to build myself back up and try again at the University of Southern Maine. Within a year I ended up in the same situation, and had to withdraw again. Redoubling my efforts I tried a third time, this time at Southern Maine Community College. Again, I found myself in a higher education setting that was unable to provide the support needed to draw out the potential I knew was in me. So in a final effort at higher education I decided to apply to Landmark College in Putney Vermont - a school that specializes in teaching individuals with learning disabilities. With the right support and in an understanding community, I was finally able to find success. I graduated with my bachelors of Life Science, was awarded the Undergraduate Research Award, I now have published articles in scientific journals, I am on the Young Adult Leadership Council for the National Center for Learning Disabilities, I've participated in the Vermont Biomedical Research Network, I am the Vice Chair of the Maine State Rehabilitation Council and the only reason any of these accolades are possible is because I attended a school that believes in what this legislation seeks to encourage. This is why I ask the members of this committee to vote in favor of LD46.