

Melissa Harding
Testimony in Support of: LD 1566 An Act to Provide Compensation to Individuals with Lived
Experience Serving on Advisory Boards, Commissions, Councils
and Similar Groups
Date: 4/28/2025
To : The Committee On State And Local Government

Senator Baldacci, Representative Salisbury, and Esteemed Members of the Committee,

My name is Melissa Harding, and I'm a parent leader and organizer, speaking today in strong support of LD 1566, a crucial step toward equity and justice: compensating individuals for their lived experience contributions.

Too often, people like me are asked to share deeply personal stories, offer insight on policies, or participate in advisory work—without compensation. Yet our knowledge is not only valid, it's essential. We're asked to do the emotional labor, relive trauma, and shape systems—but are often expected to do so for free, while others in the room are being paid.

Lived experience is a form of professional expertise. And just like legal, clinical, or academic insight, it deserves to be recognized and compensated fairly.

For example, I served on the Commission to Study Expansion of Public Preschool and Early Care and Education, in one of two appointed seats for parents with lived experience, providing my expertise, personal experience, and critical first hand knowledge of the current state of Early Childhood Education, that they said helped shape their approach. Yet I was not paid—despite the time, preparation, and emotional energy it required.

This bill acknowledges a basic truth: “Nothing about us without us” must also mean compensation to remove barriers of participation. It would ensure that people with lived experience are treated with the same respect as any other consultant or contributor—especially when our stories and knowledge are shaping policy and practice.

It's not just about fairness—it's about building better systems. Policies shaped by people most impacted are more informed, more effective, and more just.

I urge you to vote yes on LD 1566 and affirm that lived experience is not charity work—it's expert work. And it's time we treat it that way.

Thank you for your time, for listening, and for your commitment to equity.

Respectfully,
Melissa Harding
Waldo County
Maine State Parent Ambassador