



Testimony of Katie Qualey

LD 1932: *An Act to Support Essential Support Workers and Enhance Workforce Development*

Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services

January 20, 2026

Good afternoon, Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and esteemed members of the Health and Human Services Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 1932: *An Act to Support Essential Support Workers and Enhance Workforce Development*.

My name is Bridget McCabe and I work for 3Rivers. I have also prepared my own testimony, which I am happy to share later, if time permits.

Today, however, I am here to present testimony on behalf of Katie Qualey, who is unable to attend in person. Katie lives in Patten and wanted to make sure her voice was heard today. She asked that I share her words and story with you, and that you know she strongly supports of LD 1932.

The following are Katie's words:

My name is Katie, I have been attending Community Supports for 18 years. When I first started, I did not have much self-confidence. Then I had the opportunity to be president of our local SUFU chapter (Speaking Up for Us). Being voted president helped me feel good about myself and gave me a sense of purpose. About seven years ago, that chapter ended, and for a while, I wasn't sure how to get involved again.

Staff at 3Rivers helped me reconnect with other SUFU chapters and with our rights advocate. They also supported me in planning, organizing, and attending a trip to Augusta for Advocacy Day. I was excited to meet with Senator Trey Stewart and hoped to meet Senator Susan Collins another time.

Volunteering has also been very important to me. I started volunteering at Katahdin School when I was in school, and after I graduated, I really missed it. With staff support, I was able to return to volunteering two days a week. They transported me, stayed in contact with my teacher, and helped me plan my visits. Now, 18 years later, I still volunteer two days a week, without staff support.

There were times my volunteer schedule conflicted with SUFU meetings. Staff helped me explore options, like changing days or starting a new SUFU chapter, but I wanted to find other ways to advocate. With their guidance, I learned about the Maine Developmental Services Oversight Board (OAB) and The Ideas Matter Advisory Committee with 3Rivers. I researched the boards, met members, and now I am an

active board member. Being on these boards gives me a chance to share my story, be a role model, and use my voice to help others.

I also participate in 1:1 community membership activities. During this time, I attended SKILLS driving school, studied for my exam, reconnected with an old friend, and pursued other advocacy opportunities. As I've become more independent, staff have gradually shifted from hands-on support to guidance and encouragement, letting me take the lead while being there when needed.

For me, "good support" means helping me get where I need to go and then trusting me to take it from there as I build independence. The more we advocate, the more opportunities we have. Without advocacy and the support of direct support professionals, many people without a voice would not be heard.

Finally, I want to say congratulations to the DSPs who have won awards this past year. I want to thank all the DSPs who push us out of our comfort zones and support us as we grow. What I love most about volunteering at Katahdin School is the simple joy of seeing the kids' smiles. I wouldn't change a thing about the support I've received.

Supporting direct support professionals through **LD 1932** is critical for people like me. When DSPs are paid fairly, our communities benefit, our independence grows, and we can continue to contribute, advocate, and live fully in our communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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