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Testimony in Support of LD 2175: Resolve, Regarding Legislative Review of Portions of Chapter 115: The Credentialing of Education Personnel, a Major Substantive Rule of the Department of Education, State Board of Education

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Gay Anne McDonald and I serve as the Executive Director for The Maine Administrators of Services for Children with Disabilities (MADSEC), representing over 400 special education professionals serving students with disabilities in both public and private schools.

On behalf of the Maine Administrators of Services for Children with Disabilities (MADSEC), I submit this testimony in strong support of LD 2175: Resolve, Regarding Legislative Review of Portions of Chapter 115: The Credentialing of Education Personnel, a Major Substantive Rule of the Department of Education, State Board of Education.

MADSEC extends sincere appreciation to the Maine State Board of Education and the Certification and Higher Education Committee for their thoughtful work and dedication throughout this rulemaking process. Their significant contributions to update Chapter 115 rule was done in a manner that maintains Maine's tradition of high expectations for educational personnel with current advancements and complexities. This approach balances the need for quality educators with practicality and fairness.

We would like to highlight a few of the proposed changes to Chapter 115 specific to the credentialing of school personnel for the provision of special education services of which our organization strongly supports.

Endorsement 282: Teacher of Children with Disabilities

This expansion strengthens Maine's commitment to meeting the complex needs of students with disabilities and aligns with the implementation of LD 345: An Act to Transition the Responsibility for Child Find Activities and for Ensuring a Free, Appropriate Public Education for Eligible Children from the Child Development Services System to School Administrative Units (Title 20-A, §7209-A) and the Maine



Unified Special Education Regulation, Birth to Age Twenty-Two (Chapter 101), effective July 26, 2024.

With the transition of the FAPE service duty for children under Early Childhood Special Education (Part B, Section 619) to local school administrative units, there is now a critical need for special education teachers to hold endorsement within the 3-5 age group in order to provide mandated services to children with disabilities. The expansion underscores the significant benefit that children with disabilities obtain from specialized instruction and intervention through an individualized education program (IEP) within an early childhood setting, promoting early skill development and helping to close potential achievement gaps before they widen in later grades.

Without this expansion, Maine children identified with a disability within this age group risk not receiving mandated special education services—despite the presence of qualified and certified special education teachers who are ready to provide these essential supports.

Endorsement 283: Provider of Early Intervention/Teacher of Children with Disabilities, Birth to Age 5

The proposed stand-alone 283 endorsement for early intervention services for infants and toddlers elevates the importance of early intervention services under Part C of IDEA; clearly differentiates Endorsement 283 from Endorsement 282; ensures Maine's youngest learners receive high-quality, developmentally appropriate service; and provides flexibility to serve children with disabilities until age five supports continuity of services and programmatic stability during a critical developmental period.

Renewal Option

Additionally, MADSEC strongly supports and appreciates the proposed renewal option allowing current 282 certificate holders to renew under the revised age/grade span. This allowance is critically important to ensure immediate workforce capacity as districts assume full FAPE responsibility for children ages 3-5 under Early Childhood Special Education. Without this renewal flexibility, experienced and currently practicing special education teachers could be unintentionally excluded from serving preschool-aged children, despite possessing the expertise and professional preparation necessary to provide high-quality, developmentally appropriate services. Providing this renewal pathway prevents unnecessary staffing shortages with the implementation of LD 345; preserves institutional knowledge and experienced educators within local school administrative units; ensures continuity of services for children with disabilities; and avoids requiring duplicative coursework or additional credentialing barriers for educators who are already effectively serving students with disabilities.

MADSEC further supports:

- The clarification of coursework requirements under Section 2.1.B.2.(b) and (c), and the addition of residencies, apprenticeships, and practicums as acceptable means of meeting program requirements, recognizing the high-quality preparation these experiences provide.

- The addition of a third eligibility pathway through portfolio evaluation, which promotes inclusivity, professional growth, and flexibility—helping to address the ongoing special education teacher shortage while maintaining high standards of preparation, particularly for career changers and educators looking to transition to special education endorsement.
- A revision to (c) under the Conditional Certificate for Endorsement: Educational Technician III to Teacher of Children with Disabilities, to clarify that the applicant has been hired as a special education teacher and provides a letter from the employing school. This revision eliminates confusing language and streamlines the conditional certification process.

MADSEC offers the following recommendation with deep respect for the significant and thoughtful work undertaken by the Maine State Board of Education and the Certification and Higher Education Committee. We recognize the substantial time, expertise, and stakeholder engagement that informed these proposed revisions, and our comments are not intended to oppose, detract from, or distract from that work, but rather to support smooth implementation and long-term clarity.

Consideration:

1. As a minor recommendation intended solely to promote clarity and reduce potential confusion in implementation, MADSEC suggests consideration of consistent terminology across endorsements—specifically the use of either “pre-kindergarten” or “preschool” uniformly throughout the rule. While this is not a substantive change, consistent terminology may help to avoid interpretive questions and avoid unnecessary confusion.

In closing, MADSEC appreciates the thoughtful revisions reflected in Chapter 115 brought to this Committee and for the State Board’s commitment to strengthening Maine’s educator certification system. These proposed updates reflect the realities of Maine’s evolving education landscape and reinforce the shared goal of ensuring that all students—especially those with disabilities—receive the high-quality instruction and supports they deserve.

MADSEC provides strong support for the passing of LD 2175 and urges the Committee to vote “ought to pass” on this bill with consideration of the point brought forth above. Thank you for consideration and for your continued service. Please feel free to contact me with any questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted,

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