



**Lydia V. Crafts**

19 Timber Lane  
Newcastle, ME 04553  
Phone: (207) 593-2664  
[Lydia.Crafts@legislature.maine.gov](mailto:Lydia.Crafts@legislature.maine.gov)

**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

2 STATE HOUSE STATION  
AUGUSTA, MAINE 04333-0002  
(207) 287-1400  
TTY: MAINE RELAY 711

Monday, March 22, 2021

Good Afternoon Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. I am Representative Lydia Crafts and I represent House District 90. I am here this afternoon to present my bill, LD 350, An Act to Increase the Number of Courses Regarding Autism Spectrum Disorder That Count toward Special Education Certification.

Current certification requirements for special educators in the state of Maine require 24 credits in the subject area of special education. Only one class (3 credits) may be obtained from what's designated as an "Autism" class. The goal of my bill is to increase this allowance to 3 classes or 9 credits. I propose this legislation to you today because it is important to me and my constituents that our schools find and hire highly qualified teachers to educate our children. As our student needs change and research identifies and updates best practices, it's important that teachers have the choice to pursue expertise and skills in content areas, such as working with children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD).

Today one in 54 children is diagnosed with ASD. In 2000 the rate of diagnosis was one in 150 children. This is a near tripling of the number of students identified with ASD. This change demonstrates a necessary shift in educational programming and teacher skills if we are to meet the needs of students in the state of Maine.

Based on the DSM-V diagnostic criteria, children with ASD can have a combination of challenges in communication, social reciprocity, and social relationships, as well as restrictive or repetitive patterns of behaviors. The complexities of ASD and its implication on student learning needs are significant. Current research illustrates the importance of early intervention and the role of evidence based practices in positive outcomes for children.

District 90 Bremen, Bristol, Damariscotta, Newcastle, Nobleboro (part) South Bristol (part) and Monhegan Plantation, plus the unorganized territory of Louds Island



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There is a wealth of evidence based strategies, teaching skills, and positive behavior supports that can enhance a child's educational experience. UMaine currently offers the Graduate Certificate in Autism Spectrum Disorders, which provides instruction in teaching methods, assessments, positive behavior supports, and communication development. The purpose of my bill is to allow courses, such as these, to count toward the certification of special educators.

Lastly, outside of the legislature I am the director for a regional special education behavior program. Our program serves students with a diverse range of learning needs and many of them have ASD diagnoses. Throughout the history of our program, and programs around our state, I have witnessed firsthand the importance and value of recruiting teaching staff with the experience, knowledge, and understanding of students with ASD. I hope that this bill will allow special educators the opportunity to pursue increased training in the field as part of their professional certification.

Thank you and I am happy to answer any questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Lydia Crafts".

Lydia Crafts  
State Representative