



Maine Developmental Disabilities Council

March 22, 2021

Testimony Neither for Nor Against of LD 350 “An Act To Increase the Number of Courses Regarding Autism Spectrum Disorder That Count toward Special Education Certification”

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and the distinguished members of the Joint Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Nancy Cronin and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Developmental Disabilities Council (DD Council)¹.

There is such a need for special education teachers to gain skills and knowledge about the provision of appropriate education for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). That said, the spectrum of characteristics children with autism exhibit overlaps many conditions like, to name a few; non-verbal learning disorder, ADHD, sensory disorders and speech and language disorder.

MDDC is concerned that connecting the curriculum content to one disability will inappropriately link the techniques to only a few children, as opposed to the many students who could benefit, regardless of their disability label. Conversely, every child with ASD is different and just because one technique works for one student who has ASD doesn't mean it will work for the next. Specifying courses by disability is limiting.

¹ Councils on Developmental Disabilities were created through the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (DD Act) in 1970. Maine's DD Council has been advocating for individuals with Developmental Disabilities (DD) for over 40 years. The DD Council is a federally-funded, independent organization with members from across the state, including persons with disabilities, family members, and representatives of public and private agencies which provide services and/or funding for services for individuals with developmental disabilities.

As required in federal law¹, our purpose is to promote systems change to ensure that all individuals with developmental disabilities are able to live and fully participate in their communities of choice. Working in partnership with people with disabilities, parents, advocates, and policy makers, Maine's DD Council works to promote the independence, integration, and inclusion of all people with disabilities through advocacy, capacity building, and systems change activities throughout the state of Maine and on the national level. The DD Council's mission is **to create a Maine in which all people are valued and respected because we believe communities are stronger when everyone is included**. The Maine DD Council employs four full-time staff who are responsible for all of the internal projects, external grants, and business of the Council.

Instead, consider a broader term such as Developmental Disability which includes ASD. This will create a much broader net of techniques within the courses. It also will encourage the curriculum to teach how to identify when to use the techniques.

We support increased training about Developmental Disabilities, including ASD. We are simply concerned that such a specific label limits the potential such required courses could bring to many students.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you today and would be happy to take any questions.