



DATE: March 22, 2021  
TO: Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs  
FROM: Samantha Warren, UMS Director of Government & Community Relations  
[samantha.warren@maine.edu](mailto:samantha.warren@maine.edu) / (207) 632-0389  
RE: **LD 350, An Act to Increase the Number of Courses Regarding Autism Spectrum Disorder That Count Toward Special Education Certification**

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Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs: I am writing today on behalf of the University of Maine System (UMS) to inform your consideration of LD 350, *An Act to Increase the Number of Courses Regarding Autism Spectrum Disorder That Count Toward Special Education Certification*.

In 2014, the University of Maine launched a [graduate certificate program in autism spectrum disorders](#) (ASD) to prepare experienced educators, administrators and related service providers to assume leadership roles in the development and implementation of educational programs for students with autism in school settings. The four Special Education courses are taken one-at-a-time in sequence to build knowledge and understanding, and can be completed in one year and entirely online. So far, 57 individuals have earned this certificate. As LD 350 has identified, only one of the program's courses could be applied toward the 282 teacher endorsement. This may lead to a gap in an educator's knowledge and skills for supporting students with ASD.

The University of Maine at Farmington (UMF) and the University of Maine at Machias (UMM) both offer one course that focuses primarily on autism/ASD, both of which are classified as Special Education courses. Likewise, students enrolled at the University of Maine Augusta (UMA) who are seeking special education certification (282) participate in the UMM Special Education courses, including the autism-specific course. The UMF course covers historical perspectives on developmental disabilities such as autism, instructional planning, and school and community supports. Meanwhile, the UMM course is focused on teaching students with ASD and covers IDEA and DSM-V (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) definitions, prevalence and possible causes while also exploring characteristics, teaching strategies, adaptations and related disorders secondary to autism.

Given the increasingly prevalence of autism/ASD (now an estimated 1 in 54 children) and that many students with ASD are provided services in settings taught by educators with the 282 endorsement, we believe there is benefit to more coursework specific to ASD being accepted toward professional teacher certification with a special education 282 endorsement.

Additionally, I wanted to make you aware that UMaine is home to the [Maine Autism Institute for Education and Research](#) (MAIER), which is supported by funding and partnership with the Maine Department of Education. Launched in 2014, the institute is dedicated to improving outcomes for individuals with ASD through professional development, technical assistance, collaborative consultation and research. MAIER has provided professional development to more than 2,100 general educators, special educators and related services providers as well as educational and social events for families. Its director would welcome participating in a work session on LD 350.

In the meantime, please know that through our education, research and public service, the UMS looks forward to continuing to be a resource to the field and Maine families, including to support students with autism/ASD.