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Sen. Rafferty, Rep. Brennan, and Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee: My name is Lynne Williams, and I represent House District 135, which includes the Towns of Bar Harbor, Lamoine and Mount Desert. On the personal level, I am the parent of a 32 year old young man who went through the special education system in CA and ME. I am also an attorney and a psychologist, who practiced special education law for many years, including working as an independent contractor Special Education Hearing Officer and Mediator for the Maine DOE and since then have represented families of special needs children throughout the the State. I am a Co-Sponsor of LD 552, as I know a number of you are.

IEP meetings can be difficult, and emotionally challenging. Despite the fact that I knew the law inside out, I often asked a lay advocate to accompany me to my son's IEP meetings because I knew there was a chance that I would start crying or just shut down and not be able to be a good advocate for my son. So, from my perspective, the more specific and detailed the Rules are, the better it is for the process and for the participants.

What Rep. Millett's bill does is make a positive change leading to increased clarity and predictability. That is what families need. They may disagree with a proposed change, but making it clear in the regulations that if a family disagrees with a proposed change to their child's IEP, the status quo remains. While they are few and far between, I have seen instances where a family felt threatened by an administrator that if they disagreed with a proposed change to an IEP, the services that were already being given would be decreased or eliminated. This bill clarifies that the default in the case of a disagreement is the status quo. This will then give the parties time to work creatively to come up with a change that is acceptable to all, possibly through mediation, which I always consider to be a positive forum for dispute resolution, or via a Due Process hearing.

I urge you to vote "Ought to Pass" on LD 552. Thank you for listening and I would be willing to answer any questions.

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