



Maine Parent Federation

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Senator Rafferty
Representative Brennan
Members of the Educational and Cultural Affairs Committee

RE: LD 552 An Act To Strengthen the Individualized Education Program Process

My name is Carrie Woodcock I am the parent of two children with special needs and the Executive Director for Maine Parent Federation (MPF), the federally funded Parent Training and Information Center (PTI) and Family to Family Health Information Center (F2F). We assist families of children with disabilities and special healthcare needs to navigate all systems of care including the Individualized Education Program (IEP) process. I am submitting this testimony in support of LD 552 An Act To Strengthen the Individualized Education Program Process.

The Individual's Disability Education Act (IDEA) states that parents of children with an IEP are equal members of the IEP team. However, currently in Maine the IEP process does not require parent consent to make changes to the IEP. The process does require team consensus but in the event in which team consensus cannot be met, in other words the parent and the district do not agree, the decision falls to the district. This ultimately gives the power of all IEP decisions to the local school district's special education administrator and thus negating a parent's right to be an equal member of the IEP team.

A district's only responsibility in this instance would be to notify the parents through a Written Notice 7 days prior to the IEP change. A parent's only recourse would be to, within that 7 day period, initiate a due process hearing, file a complaint, or get the school to agree to mediation. All these processes put up significant barriers for parents including being confusing, time consuming, and financially burdensome. These barriers make it difficult for parents to access and pursue this option again putting the parent in a position of an unequal IEP team member.

Being a parent is my greatest accomplishment and being a parent of two children with disabilities has been my greatest challenge. As a parent and an advocate for my children I would do anything to ensure they are safe and their needs are met. Imagine being in a position where you are attending a meeting to create a plan for your child to access one of their most important needs and the ability to make those decisions were in the hands of someone who does not know your child best. I acknowledge that professional educators will possess more knowledge about available programs for my child. However, I am the expert on my child and it is my job to take that knowledge and recommend what I feel will have the most positive impact on my child. The system we currently have in place too often overlooks this parental feedback at best and outright rejects it at worst. Despite coming to the table with the most

knowledge about the child, parents are too often dismissed and interventions put into place without consent.

Additionally, for individuals who are the age of majority and remain in charge of their educational decisions this change will empower them to have a larger voice in their programs. They would be allowed to not provide consent for a change in which they do not agree with for their own IEP. There is a large emphasis on empowering individuals with disabilities of transition age to have a greater voice in their planning. Studies show when they do the outcomes for more independent living after public schooling are more positive. There is no better empowerment than to be in charge of your own planning with the support of a team. There is no greater evil to empowerment than to have an adult strike down and override your ideas for your own plan.

Currently 12 other states require parental consent for any changes to be implemented to an IEP. If this language was not in alignment with IDEA then these policies would not be present in these states. The language being proposed within this bill is not currently in alignment with the Maine Unified Special Education Regulations (MUSER) as what we are proposing is a change to the current language. MUSER must meet or exceed IDEA and can be updated to reflect this change as it does not violate IDEA.

Educational Technicians are often the individuals who provide the most direct assistance to students receiving an IEP throughout the entirety of their school day. They are crucial to not only implementing the IEP but to providing feedback at IEP meetings as to how these services are working. Too often schools do not allow for their participation at IEP meetings. It is crucial for all team members of a student to be present at an IEP meeting especially a member who is providing direct instruction.

It is for these reasons that as a professional and a parent myself I urge this committee to support LD 552.

Thank you for your consideration.

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