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Committee Members,

Hello, my name is April Fournier, I am a resident of Portland, mother of four and a member of the Dine' Nation. I am writing to support LD474- An Act Regarding School Discipline for Maine's Youngest Children.

I am an Early Childhood Special Educator. I have worked in this field for almost 10 years after changing occupations when my own child was diagnosed with autism. My career path has afforded me a lot of opportunities to explore why children behave the way they do, what motivates them, what is missing for them and most importantly how we respond.

What I have learned and believe is that all behavior is a form of communication. There is a function. Behavior is motivated by something. When we're hungry we might become cranky, unfocused, and have a difficult time functioning until we address that need. When we're tired we might become forgetful, combative, or withdrawn until we address that need. When we have been traumatized, we might react in an unexpected way because our internal wiring is not sure how to respond to being triggered. I think about all of the skills we have learned as fully functional adults to cope, regulate and manage these situations and yet we ask some of our youngest community members to have the same skills available to them at all times or they will be removed and no longer benefit from their community.

What I have learned is that when we wraparound our community members, our children and families, to address their most basic needs, we set them up for success in so many areas of their life. If we ensure families have safe housing, sustainable food sources, supportive and nurturing parenting and access to educational opportunities we reduce the likelihood of maladaptive behaviors happening. We're meeting needs, so behaviors are less likely to occur.

When we operate from a punitive lens, we expel, we take away, we punish, we remove; we have not done anything but create more trauma and more harm. The basic principles to address behavior is to create something to replace it. If you want aggression to stop you have to figure out what need isn't being met and create a replacement option for that aggression. We need to have a trauma informed lens, engage in positive behavior intervention and supports and recognize that the external school environment can have significant impacts in the classroom. We are just as responsible for our student's mental health as we are for their academic success.

I ask that we make the investment in our students and our community by voting to support LD474. Let's provide support, assistance, coaching, training, professional development and accountability for our student's behavior. We can do that by understanding that expulsion of our youngest learners is no longer a tool to be used. Thank you for your time.