



May 17, 2021

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

RE: LD 135, LD 255, and LD 386

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Educational and Cultural Affairs Committee. My name is Cathy Dionne, and I am the parent of an adult child with autism and the Executive Director of the Autism Society of Maine. I am submitting this testimony in favor of LD 135, LD 255, and LD 386.

Thank you all for your continued efforts around such an important topic but we need to move forward with something in place. I know the last two years has been around research and looking at our current state. Early Intervention is key to families who have a child diagnosed with autism. The last couple of years have been difficult for families trying to receive early intervention services.

When it comes to 0 – 2-year-olds, they need to be better identified, have services available to them, and appropriate providers who can administer timely evidenced-based interventions. There should never be a wait list for this service. Having children receive services as early as we can will provide better outcomes for them and perhaps even less services needed as they move into the public school setting.

Parents are the experts of their children and parent choice can be a powerful tool in choosing the most appropriate educational placement. Therefore, for 3-year-old, parents need to be able to choose between a Part C or Part B placement. Some 3-year-olds may need some additional interventions before they a pre-school setting placement and served best service in Part C. While others may feel that ~~Part B~~ their child is ready and will do well with peer interaction making Part B the better option. Let families decide.

Moving 4 – 5-year old's into the public school would be best. Now is the time for universal pre-kindergarten especially since the Federal Government has introduced legislation to fully fund public pre-kindergarten programs. This must also include children with disabilities. Provide guidance to the schools and allow to contract out. This will allow the waters to be tested before the next move of 3-year-olds into the public-school setting.

Thank you for your consideration,

Cathy E. Dionne
Executive Director