



Testimony of Margaret Leitch Copeland,
Board Member, Maine Children's Alliance
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
LD 386, An Act to Improve Operations at the Department of Education
May 18, 2021

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Margaret Leitch Copeland, and I am offering testimony in support of LD 386 as a board member of the Maine Children's Alliance, a state-wide nonpartisan, non-profit research and advocacy organization whose mission is to advocate for sound policies and promote best practices to improve the lives of Maine's children, youth and families.

I wish to offer testimony neither for nor against this bill, but instead wish to ask the committee to revisit the development of a Department of Early Education and Care, proposed by Representative Rebecca Millett in the last legislative session.

A dozen years ago, then Governor Mitt Romney put in place such a Department in Massachusetts, which has been enormously successful in garnering and administering funding for children's education and care from birth to age five, both those children who have been identified with disabilities and those who are developing more typically.

If we had such a department in Maine, we would not have the difficult decision today as to where to put Part B and Part C funds to best serve our youngest children. They would go to the Department of Early Education and Care, where the children who could be identified early would be served seamlessly until entering kindergarten. And Maine would no longer be tied for last in the nation for serving infants under the age of one with disabilities (2021 Maine KIDS COUNT Data Book).¹

I urge you all to consider a bill in the next Legislative session to create a Department of Early Education and Care as a means of responding to the need to bolster early intervention services across our state. We must do better by our youngest children; we all know that early intervention will reduce the need for special education services in grades 1-12, which are the highest in the country.² We can and must do better than this to support the developmental needs of Maine's children.

Thank you for your consideration.

¹ https://mainechildrensalliance.org/site/assets/files/1773/2021_kidscount_final_interactive.pdf

² Ibid