

# Woodfords FAMILY SERVICES

## Testimony Regarding

L.D. 135 *An Act To Address Issues in Funding Prekindergarten Programs*, L.D. 255 *An Act To Ensure Student Success*, and  
L.D. 386 *An Act To Improve Operations at the Department of Education*

Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs  
Tuesday, May 18, 2021

Good afternoon, Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. Thank you for the opportunity to offer consolidated testimony in regards to the bills being drafted to adopt recommendations from the PCG *Independent Review of the State's Early Childhood Special Education Services Report*.

My name is Pete Plummer, Chief Operating Officer of Woodfords Family Services. Woodfords is Neither for Nor Against these bills, we are here to help ensure the successful transition of these 3-5 year old preschool children with special needs. Woodfords Family Services is a Not For Profit social service organization, with a home office in Westbrook, Maine. Our organization's mission is to support children and families with special needs in the Maine Community. One of our most precious programs is for preschool children with special needs that need services to prepare them for kindergarten. Woodfords has three licensed special purpose preschools in Maine. One in Westbrook, one in Waterville, and one on the Pineland Campus in New Gloucester. In addition to being licensed which is a MaineCare requirement, and a criteria K-12 schools are not required to meet, we also need educational program approvals from Child Development Services (CDS), similar to the program approval that the Department of Education (DOE) has for K-12 programs.

In my role as a member of the Legislative Advisory Committee reporting on the PCG report, which Nancy Cronin chaired, I have been fortunate enough to be part of the continuum of discussions for these children. A quick thought on various topics, as time is short. I am available to answer any questions during the work session, if helpful.

**Funding:** I have heard the EDU Committee state that the SAU's will be fully supported by DOE if/when this transition occurs. I do not have all the answers, but here are some questions that need to be answered, as the PCG report is not totally inclusive of the full costs. The major question, Will the current CDS allocated funding be enough to support the transition to SAUs? I do not think so, because **in addition to the CDS funding, SAUs will need to pay MaineCare Seed dollars on the treatment costs for these children**, plus educational funding to the Special Purpose preschool they contract with to provide services, similar to the K-12 Special Purpose Private Schools, or to pay for the educational costs of these children in their own SAU program. The MaineCare Seed dollars are currently paid for by MaineCare, and this cost will be transferred to the SAU's, the same way the K-12 programs work.

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**Centralized Billing:**

I am all for the SAUs having centralized billing. The contracted Special Purpose Preschools should maintain their own billing responsibilities.

**Staffing:**

This is the number one concern for the Woodfords Special Purpose Preschools. We do attract and train many Ed Tech's/BHPs, as they are one in the same. Ed Tech's to comply with the requirements from CDS and BHPs to comply with the requirements of MaineCare. In addition to these requirements, our staff receive additional training on Behavior Analysis that allows them to work with Board Certified Behavior Analysts (BCBAs) and Licensed Clinicians. This makes them attractive to SAUs and Specialized K-12 programs. The result is high turnover, but we continually work hard to reduce turnover and compete with better funded K-12 programs.

**Special Purpose Preschool Capacity:**

We all realize that there is a lack of capacity to prepare these special needs children for kindergarten, from Child Find, to Treatment, to a least restrictive environment that results in a typical classroom environment. There are holes in the service continuum, which is why we are all here. The chronic underfunding to CDS and all levels of contract providers, has led to the lack of services. No matter the path taken, this lack of funding needs to be addressed, that is why the SAUs are nervous about this transition and want commitment to appropriate funding from the legislature. The Special Purpose preschools have filled a large portion of the need, with well trained staff in licensed facilities. I encourage the EDU Committee to work with the Health and Human Services Committee to be aware of a pending change to the MaineCare rule related to school-based services, LD 854.

Thank you for your consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have or provide additional information.

Respectfully submitted,

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