

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: 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*

My name is Andrea Richards, Director of Early Childhood Services at UCP of Maine. I oversee two preschool programs in the Bangor area for children who need extra adult support in order to succeed. While the needs of the children we work with may vary, the training received by staff is very specialized. I am a certified special education teacher for children birth-five, a licensed clinical counselor, and a behavior analyst. I have a master's degree in Education and have worked in behavioral health for 14 years. It is my understanding that the Committee is considering crafting three bills utilizing the draft language discussed in the Committee and then last circulated Thursday, May 13. That is the language and concepts that I will address here in my consolidated testimony and remarks today.

I work with many individuals with similar backgrounds to mine – from behavior analyst to clinical social worker to certified teacher to support teachers with decades of experience working with children with special needs. We spend a lot of time on trainings within our program. We provide training on de-escalation and how to help children calm down when they're overwhelmed, dysregulated, or frustrated. We provide training on using applied behavior analysis to teach new skills, like toileting, playing with friends, or writing their name. We provide training on our research-based curriculum, and how to assess when and how the children are learning new skills. We also coordinate trainings with the occupational therapists, speech therapists, and other professionals working with our students.

When the state of Maine adjusts its system for working with young children, I hope that the experience, training, and expertise that exists within special purpose preschools is seen as a resource for the community. The public schools in our state are full of smart, creative educators and administrators. I want to be clear that I don't question the capabilities of the public schools at all. What the special purpose preschools have is a structured, friendly environment that can help children learn new skills and increase their safety, so that when they join public school, they can be successful. We want to see all of our students joining a class of their friends to learn and play. We want them to be included, as much as they can be. We want to assist the kids who need another year or two of extra support before they join the mainstream classroom environment. When you consider the details of how to adjust the oversight and programming of education for young children, please remember special purpose preschools. Build us into that system – we want to help educate Maine's children, too.

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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