



Maine Parent Federation

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

RE: LD #'s 135, 255, & 386

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the Educational and Cultural Affairs Committee. My name is Carrie Woodcock I am the parent of two children with special needs and the Executive Director for Maine Parent Federation (MPF), the federally funded Parent Training and Information Center (PTI), Family to Family Health Information Center (F2F) and Statewide Family Network. We assist families of children with disabilities and special healthcare needs to navigate all systems of care including early intervention. I am submitting this testimony neither for nor against LD #'s 135, 255, and 386.

Thank you to all of those who over the last 2 years have worked diligently to research the current state of Maine's early intervention system and present legislation to make necessary changes. I believe we can all agree a timely, appropriate, and available Early Intervention system is one of the most important services our state can provide for our children with diagnosis'. It has been clear that the current operation of our Early Intervention has fallen short leaving our children unidentified and underserved. While it is good to see that we are moving forward with legislation to make changes I do believe what has been submitted does not do enough for our children.

Moving Child Developmental Services (CDS) to the Maine Department of Education is a lateral move. CDS currently resides under MDOE and while there will be some movement for employees currently within CDS, I do not believe this will change services or improve our child find for ages birth through 2. I do applaud Representative Millett's suggestion of an addition of language instructing MDOE to work with the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) to leverage relationships with medical providers to improve child find numbers. However, I still believe this move does not make enough change to see a true positive impact for our birth to 2 population. I understand it is late in the game but I would recommend moving birth to 2 to DHHS.

There has been much discussion about how to serve our 3-year old's, whether in Part C or in Part B. Some 3-year old's maybe be better served remaining in Part C as the jump to preschool may not be the best fit. While, others may truly benefit from interaction with typically developing peers and receive services in a preschool model. In short, the Least Restrictive Environment may vary greatly from one child to the next. I would suggest that the decision for where 3-year old's are best served be a parent's choice. After much research and discussions with colleagues I do believe the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act allows for this provision.

Finally, moving 4-to-5-year old's to our public schools (with a proper transition) I believe is where they will be best served. The evolution of public pre-kindergarten programs in our state and the potential of federal legislation to fully fund public pre-kindergarten programs makes these programs the best fit for Least Restrictive Environment. In addition, this placement will ease the transition from Pre-K to Kindergarten which can be one of the more difficult transitions for children and families. However, as is currently the case in our public schools, if the Individual Education Program (IEP) team decides another Pre-K program best meets the needs of a student they can be placed out of district within that special purpose program.

This legislation is a beginning but it does not go far enough to make the changes we need in this state. It is well-documented that for many years now the current system is failing our children. Our children need us to step up and make big change now. The proper Early Intervention can mean a life time of positive differences and outcomes for our children.

Thank you for your consideration.

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