

susan parks
Augusta

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Good morning, Senator Rafferty and Representative Brennan, and the distinguished members of the Educational and Cultural Affairs Committee:

My name is Susan J. Parks. I live in Augusta, Maine. I write in favor of L.D. 135 for much-needed improvements to Maine's Child Development Services (CDS) system.

For 19 years I worked with families of infants and children with disabilities to inform them of their rights under the Federal Individuals with Disabilities Rights Act (IDEA) Parts B (for children ages 5 through 21), C (for children ages 3 through 5), and B-619 (for infants and toddlers through age 3). I saw that the CDS system had much potential; however, there were waiting lists, sometimes long ones, for infants and children to be served by the system after they'd been found eligible for those services. The infants and children needed and deserved the help, but it was not there for them.

The early years of an infant's-baby's life are crucial for the development of all future cognitive, social and emotional development. The earlier an infant is identified as one with a developmental delay, the more benefit that infant will receive from CDS services. However, in Maine, only 77 infants were identified and started receiving services prior to their first birthday.

Too many children in Maine start early intervention services closer to age three than the recommended age of under one year. This is a disservice to those infants and babies who need and require services to help them make progress toward achievement of age-appropriate developmental milestones, be more prepared for pre-K and Kindergarten and beyond, to have more positive interactions with their peers, and reduce the need for special education services during their school years.

This bill is a way to put into place a long-term solution for our infants, babies and children.

If you have questions about the content of this testimony, please contact me at parsusan@gmail.com or (207) 441-4942.

Susan J. Parks