

February 9, 2022

Good morning, Honorable Senator Rafferty and Representative Brennan and fellow members of the Education and Cultural Affairs:

I stand proudly in front of this committee as I was the previous Executive Director of the Maine Educational Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing/Governor Baxter School for the Deaf. I applaud Representative Pierce and Senator Breen for meeting with myself and Karen Hopkins (current ED) for meeting with us almost three years ago to address an antiquated bill referred to as Chapter 304. I applaud both Representative Pierce and Senator Breen for persevering with us along with Jill Adams from MADSEC and Commissioner Pender Makin.

The previous Chapter 304 could not provide MECDHH/GBSD the resources to adequately provide the diverse needs of Maine's Deaf and Hard of Hearing children from pre-k to high school. My first year in the position of Executive Director, I was forced to lay off five staff members. It looked like a continually spiral downward of more layoffs and providing dismal services, while we were seeing increased referrals and the need for more services statewide. Karen and myself were able to speak to this committee along with the Appropriation's committee to be granted additional funds to begin moving forward in the right directions. It also allowed us to create our first pilot K-5 site based program in Brewer. After securing our staff, we found out that according to an interpretation of Chapter 304 deeming Brewer as a satellite program, we now were going to have to pay exorbitant costs that school districts were more than willing to pay but weren't allowed to without being in violation. As a result we were facing additional cuts to our entire organization. This required a request to appropriation committee for an additional \$500,000 which was granted by many of the familiar faces here today.

I am certain that you will receive strong testimonial from special educational directors throughout Maine. This brilliantly crafted bill provides clarity as to who is responsible for providing a student's Free Appropriate Public Education services. I am pleased to learn that the bill also provides a Capital Reserve Fund to support building and grounds renovations to ensure that we have a safe educational setting for our children. Additionally, the provision of a Special Education Contingency fund allows for unanticipated costs required to fulfill the educational needs of children or sites.

Nationally, Maine has always been viewed with great admiration especially for its efforts to address the educational needs of all deaf and hard of hearing children in Maine without relocating to Southern Maine for services. It is with amazement that we have endured such intense financial pressure over the years because of this antiquated Chapter 304 that likely should have been replaced decades ago. Nonetheless, I am filled with great pride and emotion knowing that we now can have this much needed reset in place to leave no deaf or hard of hearing child and community without the support they need to be successful.

In closing, I wish to thank each of you on the committee for truly understanding and caring about how to best address the educational needs of our population. I am so honored and humbled to have been the Executive Director of this truly outstanding organization with its stellar staff, families, and of course, our students.

Owen J. Logue, Ed.D.  
Former Executive Director  
MECDHH/GBSD