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Maine Administrators of Services for Children with Disabilities



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Testimony in Support of L.D. 1632

An Act To Update the Laws Regarding the Maine Educational Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and the Governor Baxter School for the Deaf

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and Distinguished Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Gay McDonald, and I am the Executive Director of the Maine Administrators of Services for Children with Disabilities (MADSEC). MADSEC represents more than 300 special education administrators and site directors in public and private schools, and other professionals in the field of special education across the State of Maine.

On behalf of MADSEC, I am submitting testimony in support of L.D. 1632, An Act To Update the Laws Regarding the Maine Educational Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing and Governor Baxter School for the Deaf in concept. Although there may be minor language changes and clarifying questions that need attention during the work session, the concept of this bill is well intended in addressing the needed changes to Chapter 304. The proposed changes to Chapter 304 were crafted through multiple conversations with a variety of stakeholders and includes both clarifying and updated language addressing the needs of students who are deaf or hard of hearing in Maine.

Particularly of interest, the proposed changes outline funding responsibilities for in-state tuition (§7404.3), members needed for placement decisions (§7405-A), and service provisions (§7405-A) pertaining to site-based programs.

MADSEC supports the inclusive approach of a site-based program, offering inclusive education within the school while also offering specific, high-quality services to meet the hearing needs of each individual student. For example, the site-based program located at Brewer Community School provides the opportunity for the student and their family to receive all the educational services offered at their school, provides specific services and expertise consultation by highly trained staff to meet their unique hearing needs, and provides a peer group of other students who are deaf or hard of hearing for students residing in their school district, as well as students residing in other districts within their region.

Without this program, students living in more rural areas would not have the same level of consistent support from a team of specialists, and most likely would be isolated from other students who are deaf or hard of hearing. Additionally, the site-based model in Brewer allows the regional school districts to work collaboratively to provide a high-quality program in the region that otherwise would be a very costly program for each individual district.

Currently, Maine only has two site-based programs, one in Portland and one in Brewer. In moving forward, MADSEC supports further expansion of site-based programs to meet the needs of all Maine students requiring this type of service, regardless of where they reside.

MADSEC also supports the proposed changes to identify that “MECDHH/GBSD will pay room and board cost for each student in grades 9-12 placed in a site-based program with a commute beyond 50 miles in distance one-way through funds appropriated by the State” (§7404.4); transportation “for students attending site-based programs from towns other than the host school towns” (§7405-A.B.4); and technical assistance “at no cost to the school administrative unit” (§7405-A.3).

MADSEC applauds the clarification of “school administrative unit or child development services regional site” (§7405-A.1 Placement). We ask that the same language be included in the last paragraph of §7405 for clarity and consistency. Currently the proposed language only lists “school administrative unit”.

Given questions regarding the proposed language that sending school districts shall pay tuition to the host school and confusion surrounding child count and subsidy for students placed at site-based programs, it will be important to clearly define which district (the sending district or host school) will maintain child count and receive subsidy for the student. It is MADSEC’s understanding that the sending school will maintain child count and receive subsidy for the student, which in turn will be a revenue source to pay the tuition to the host school. It is critical that this process be clearly articulated to sending schools and be consistent across site-based programs.

Thank you for your time and should you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Gay A. McDonald".

Gay A. McDonald
Executive Director