

Caitlin Rothe
Gorham - Woodfords Westbrook preschool
LD 1309

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and honorable members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. My name is Caitlin Rothe, and I live in Gorham. I am speaking today in strong support of LD 1309: An Act to Clarify Requirements for Payment of Tuition for Children with Disabilities by the Department of Education's Child Development Services System).

My son Jacob is currently in his second year of preschool at Woodfords in Westbrook. I am writing to make a heartfelt plea to continue funding for early intervention preschool programs. These programs are critical in helping children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) to reach their full potential and live fulfilling lives.

Research has shown that early intervention is essential. An autism diagnosis won't limit a child. But not having access to support services will.

My son has shown tremendous progress during his time at Woodfords. He was diagnosed level 3 autism and global communication delay. He barely said 10 single words in a day. Today, he is singing nursery rhymes, recites the alphabet, counts to 20, labels animals and family members. I wasn't sure I'd ever hear him say "mom" after his regression at 13 months of age. His teachers worked with him using a Christmas card and at school pick up, Jake came out and said "Mommy" after two long years and it's a moment I was never sure I'd have and I'll never forget. (and we're also thrilled he's having great success with potty training.)

These preschool programs are critical to families like mine. We cannot do it alone. We have been turned away from every other local program. The waitlists are growing, the demand is high-we need a solution to provide more opportunities for our disabled kids and not eliminate the programs they need most.

There is no cure, medicine, anything other than early intervention that has proven to help autistic individuals thrive.

Thank you all for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,
Caitlin Rothe