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April 13, 2023

Re: 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

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Cullen Ryan, and I am the Executive Director of Community Housing of Maine or CHOM. I am also the parent of a 26-year-old son with Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities (ID/DD). I serve as Chair of the Maine Coalition for Housing and Quality Services, a coalition of some 4000 people, consisting primarily of parents, that focuses on housing and quality services for people with ID/DD. I also serve as chair of the Maine Developmental Services Oversight and Advisory Board (MDSOAB).

I am testifying in 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 (CDS) System. This bill requires special purpose private schools and private general-purpose agencies that provide both educational and behavioral health services to children with disabilities who have not attained 6 years of age receive payments for the educational services they provide from the CDS System within the Department of Education. The bill requires that the CDS System work with these private schools and general-purpose agencies to establish, prior to the beginning of the 2023-2024 school year, appropriate daily rates for payments for the educational component of their services. These daily rates rely on the daily rate methodology now used. These daily rates must then be used to calculate payments for educational services.

Maine is currently seeing approximately 600 kids being supported in special purpose preschools. The extent to which children are identified and served when they're young directly correlates to better outcomes, including being able to enter kindergarten in the public school system and often a reduction in formal, paid support as they age. Investing in services for children as early as possible pays dividends down the road. This is where special purpose preschools/pre-k play a large role.

However, special purpose private schools and private general-purpose agencies that provide both educational and behavioral health services to children with disabilities under the age of 6 do not receive payments from CDS. This lack of funding has led to many of these critically important schools closing – a detriment to these children and a shortcoming of our system.

This bill would provide additional funding to CDS to establish an appropriate daily rate for these special purpose preschool/pre-k programs. This would allow very young children who have been on waiting lists for essential services to receive the critical educational support they need and deserve.

Please invest in Maine's young children with disabilities and support LD 1309.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.