



April 7, 2023

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and members of the committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, I'm asking for your 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 name is Brianne Westman, and I am the Director of Early Intervention Services at the Fraser Ford School, at Waypoint (formerly known as Waban). I am a certified Special Education teacher in the state of Maine and have dedicated over 15 years to providing special education services to young children, 3-5 years old here at Waypoint.

Prior to the pandemic, our school provided both educational and therapeutic services to over 60 children with autism and other developmental disabilities. Since then, our enrollment has drastically dropped by 50%. It is imperative that we find a way to get out of this crisis to begin serving more of these children with special needs, especially during the early years, when it is most crucial.

As a Director, I receive many calls on a weekly basis from families looking for services for their children. It pains me to have to give them the devastating news that I have no openings and that there are children that have been waiting over a year to get into a program. These conversations are often full of tears from the parents and the pure upset that their child may miss out on early intervention and how this will impact their future.

The bleak reality that we continue to be in a workforce crisis and do not have staff to serve these children needs to change. It is a highlight of mine to be able to welcome children and families through our doors, and sadly, this year, I have not been able to do so for any of the 50+ children in York County, currently waiting for services through CDS.

With this new bill putting the responsibility for the Department of Education's Child Development Services to pay the tuition for educational services, we would be able to sustain educational costs of operating our school and provide better wages to increase employment of highly qualified staff. This would be the start of rebuilding the future for these young children, who deserve the opportunity to receive the services they need.

I want there to be continued success stories, of children communicating for the first time, learning to sit for a meal and try new foods, and engage in purposeful play. Please be in favor of this new bill, to support the costs of early intervention. Early education truly is at stake.

Thank you for your consideration,

Brianne Westman, M.Ed
Director of Early Intervention Services