



**Testimony of McKenna Canham, Assistant Director of Early Childhood Services, UCP of Maine
In Support of LD 2120**

***An Act to Fund the Delivery of Educational Services to Children with Special Needs as Required by
State and Federal Law in Special Purpose Private Preschools***
Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
January 31, 2024

Good afternoon, Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. Thank you for the opportunity to offer testimony in support of LD 2120 *An Act to Fund the Delivery of Educational Services to Children with Special Needs as Required by State and Federal Law in Special Purpose Private Preschools*

My name is McKenna Canham. I am the Assistant Director of Early Childhood Services for UCP of Maine's Bridges Program. Bridges, UCP's Early Childhood Education program, is a center-based program for toddlers and preschoolers who require individualized support for a variety of reasons, including behavioral, developmental, motor, sensory, or social needs. In addition to 1:1 behavioral and/or educational support, the Bridges program has access to a variety of consultants in areas including behavioral (BCBA and LCPC), speech, and occupational therapy. We have two locations, in both Bangor, ME and Brewer, ME and we serve children from towns all around the greater Bangor area. I have been in the field of early intervention and special education for the past 8 years.

I want to thank Representative Gattine and committee co-sponsors for bringing the bill forward, as well as the entire committee for taking the first step to establish an equitable payment for the critical educational services that special purpose preschools provide to hundreds of Maine's most vulnerable children each year.

Over the years we have been open, we have impacted the lives of hundreds of children. I have watched students enter our program with no effective communication skills, to graduating our program speaking in full sentences. I have watched students blossom their social skills in the classroom every day. I have watched so many children's eyes light up when they realize they learned something new. I could write pages and pages of amazing stories of all the progress the amazing children of our program that I have had the privilege to witness. Without the presence of early intervention services, many of these stories wouldn't have been able to be told.

Lack of payment limits the frequency of such magical things happening at our programs. Lack of funding leads to lower wage rates, which means fewer staff, which means fewer students we can enroll. We have had to significantly decrease the number of children we served over the past several years due to limited means of funding. We have also had to halt or slow our plans to expand, even though we have the space to do so. A daily rate would allow us to pay our remarkable staff the rate they should be, expand our programming, and provide the best possible services to even more children in the community. We would have the potential to support over 20 children in the greater Bangor area that currently sit on our wait list.

At a time when Maine is out of compliance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act and hundreds of families and children are already on waitlists for specialized early education services, we cannot afford to lose well established and well-respected programs and hundreds of spots that could change the lives and trajectory for children with disabilities.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully Submitted,

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