

Rachel Bousquet
KidsPeace New England

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services: thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of LD 854. My name is Rachel Bousquet and I am the Director of Residential and Education Services for KidsPeace. KidsPeace is a non-profit statewide provider of a wide range of community based mental health, education and child welfare services. Most relevant to this bill, we provide behavioral health services in our special purpose schools located in Ellsworth, Millinocket and Old Town. In addition to K – 12 classrooms, we have Pre – K Developmental preschool programs in each of these locations.

A change in MaineCare rules for medically necessary school based services in developmental pre-schools without corresponding changes in educational rules and funding has the potential to pull the rug out from some of Maine's most vulnerable children.

This was the situation that we were in last year. I came before the committee last March on this issue and I am I am thankful to Representative Myer and members of this committee who listened to parents and providers and helped move a bill with similar provisions out of committee with bi-partisan support.

KidsPeace is, in principle, supportive of the idea of consolidating the MaineCare rules currently found in Sections 65 and 28 of the MaineCare manual into a single section. The devil however, as we have learned is truly in the detail. The formerly proposed Section 106 rule would have had disastrous, if unintended, consequences for 3 to 5 year old children who need the services of a specially designed program of learning readiness. For example, in our Old Town program, we are serving over 25 families whose children have special needs, with a 10+ client waiting list. The rule previously proposed would have cut up to 50% of the service hours for 98% of the kids in this program. While I'm thankful that the rule was withdrawn for now, this fact makes the point that such a rule as it is reconsidered should be major and substantive to require broad stakeholder engagement.

I expect no one in this room disputes the importance of early intervention for children with these disabilities. This is simply an established fact: early intervention is critical to later educational attainment and social success. And there is no doubt that the existing funding and regulatory requirements coming from two state departments are complex and often inconsistently applied. And this is exactly the reason why we should make sure these rules are substantive and that a stakeholder group be formed as this bill supports.

I'd like to end on a personal note: in addition to being a Director overseeing these services, I am a therapeutic foster & adoptive parent, with a five year old child currently enrolled in a developmental pre K program. I know from this experience just exactly how important these services are to him and to those who love him. Please be sure that we will all be able to help shape these rule changes to this service before we implement them by passing LD 854.

Thank you. I'm happy to take any questions.

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