



Written Testimony in Support of LD 854-An Act To Ensure Continued School-based Services for Children with Disabilities

Health and Human Services Committee

April 7, 2021

Good morning Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, and members of the Health and Human Services Committee. My name is Scott Tash, and I am the CEO at UCP of Maine. UCP of Maine has been supporting families and serving adults and children with a wide range of intellectual disabilities, mental health needs, behavioral and/or physical challenges since 1954, and those services currently include services for children birth to 5 years old in both the in-home and community settings, as well as center-based pre-school offerings in the Greater-Bangor area.

I also serve as a Board member for the Maine Association for Community Service Providers in the roles of Treasurer, and Chair of the Children's Committee, and I am pleased to offer this testimony in support of LD 854 on behalf of our Children's Committee and my specific organization, UCP of Maine.

Of primary concern, leading to the support of the bill, is ensuring the understanding of the specific and specialized needs of the 3-5-year-old population with developmental and other behavioral health challenges. Each year in our programs, we are referred and work with children who need evidence-based therapies and focused special education services in order to have the best chance of successfully transitioning to public schools. Receiving these referrals many times after the child has previously started in more traditional early education or day care settings, but were unable to be successful in those environments. Programs such as ours and others across the state, have been successful in offering the specialized services, at levels deemed medically appropriate, preparing the children to successfully integrate into the public school settings. Needed specialized services may include 1:1 behavioral and/or educational support with Behavioral Health Professionals and Education Technicians, LCPC and BCBA oversight, access to speech and occupational therapists, all working directly with and focusing on the specific needs of the child.

To fully understand the needs of the individuals, we engage with a broad team of experts to fully understand, evaluate, and deliver proper treatments. It is critically important the Department take the same approach in that any new School Based Service proposals include proper stakeholder engagement, which would include parents/guardians of the children, current providers, other advocates, existing CDS System staff, SAU's and the DOE, to allow for the various areas of expertise to engage and collaborate within a complex system of care. Early intervention for this population is critical in setting them up for

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success as they transition into advanced education settings and beyond into adulthood. Input from these groups of invested parties are all critical in ensuring appropriate levels of services, access to services, and reimbursement for services provided are maintained at levels sufficient to ensure young children continue to advance their progress, and does not limit the medically-necessary services in any way.

Therefore, we fully support the provisions within LD 854 that require:

1. The Department of Health and Human Services to convene a stakeholder group to participate in any rulemaking with representatives of providers, advocates, parents of children receiving services, the Child Development Services System, school administrative units and the Department of Education and take into account the findings from the independent review of the State's early childhood special education services.
2. Department rules pertaining to School-Based services to be major substantive.

Thank you to Representative Meyer and the committee for listening to the concerns of parents and providers last year, and I thank you for your time today, and your consideration of support for this bill.

We stand ready to work with the Department, legislators and other stakeholders on the development of any new School-Based Services rules that includes broad stakeholder engagement as well as careful consideration to potential impacts to such a vulnerable population.

Please feel free to contact me if you need additional information or with any questions you may have.

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