

Hello Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the work that you are doing for the great State of Maine, my home for the past 45 years, and the birthplace and home of my three children. I am writing today to address LD296, An Act to Provide a Tax Credit to Family Caregivers.

In 1990 I became pregnant with my first child. I developed morning sickness that never stopped, and I eventually had to close my business. By the end of the 4th month I started to think there was something going wrong, but my doctors put it down to first-time mother jitters. By the 6th month, when I still did not feel the baby move, I changed doctors, and we began ultrasounds and other diagnostics which determined that my unborn child had Intrauterine Growth Retardation.

I had been admitted to the hospital for over a week when my unborn child's heart stopped beating. My son was born by emergency C-section at about 7 1/2 months, weighing 3 lbs, 11 oz, and was admitted into the Neonatal ICU for over a week. I am forever grateful that my son survived. I had no understanding of the battle that we would face as he developed.

The next ten years were spent battling insurance companies, scheduling appointments with specialists, attending Pupil Evaluation Team meetings and hammering out IEP's, all while working double-time to provide my son with the at-home supports that he could not function without. Although the Katie Beckett program qualified my son for case management and in-home supports, he needed continual eyesight supervision and behavioral intervention at home.

I worked with GEAR, Woodfords, Maine Parent Federation, and co-founded the local support group SOURCE for parents of children with special needs in order to help our district fulfill the state mandate to provide support to parents of children with special needs. Ultimately, my child was moved to an out of district placement for his educational needs. Ensuring that my son received an appropriate education was daunting, and navigating the system was exhausting, but that is what parents do. However, for most parents, that is when their children move forward toward an independent adulthood.

Fast forward to today, 10 years later, my son has just turned 30, I have long been divorced and my other children have grown and become accomplished and successful. And so has my first child, in his unique way. He is kind and thoughtful, intelligent and funny. But he is limited by his disabilities, and that is the reality of his life. The reality of my life is that I am going to continue to support him into the foreseeable future.

My son lives with me and receives a disability check that barely would cover the cost of his groceries, let alone housing, utilities, transportation, etc. All of those expenses fall to me. All of his transportation and the coordination of necessities are managed by me, and I provide him with the support that he requires to get most of his social, emotional, and physical needs met. Some of the programs designed for adults like my son are too overwhelming for him to navigate, and some are not a good fit for him.

I recently applied for a job which I did not get. When I did a follow up with the hiring manager I was told that the fact that I did not demonstrate a long term history of consistent employment within a field counted against me. The reality for most parents is that their children come first. For single parents with adult children with special needs, the journey of parenting continues,

and we zig and zag as needed over the years to keep our adult child safe, housed, and as healthy as possible. That has a real impact on career goals, financial goals, personal goals. That is the reality.

Tax credits for caregivers makes sense. Caregivers relieve the State of providing wraparound intensive services for numerous aging and disabled community members, while providing the most humane, cost effective, and appropriate care for loved ones. I hope that you will consider providing a low barrier and meaningful tax credit for caregivers who provide support and safety for loved ones who require intensive and ongoing support.

I appreciate your consideration and hope that you will do the right thing for caregivers by supporting and passing LD296.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "April Caricchio". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

April Caricchio
South Portland, Maine
(207) 415-4561