



Maine Developmental Disabilities Council

January 13, 2016

Testimony FOR LD 1421: An Act To Establish a Tax-free Savings Program for Individuals with Disabilities

Senator McCormick, Representative Goode and the distinguished members of the Taxation Committee:

My name is Rachel Dyer, and I am the associate director of the Maine Developmental Disabilities Council. Councils on Developmental Disabilities were created through the Developmental Disabilities Assistance and Bill of Rights Act (DD Act) in 1970. Maine's DD Council has been advocating for individuals with Developmental Disabilities (DD) for over 40 years. The DD Council is a federally-funded, independent organization with members from across the state, including persons with disabilities, family members, and representatives of public and private agencies which provide services and/or funding for services for individuals with developmental disabilities. As required in federal law, we are involved in advocacy, capacity building and systemic change activities, with the goal that individuals with developmental and other disabilities of all ages are fully included, integrated and involved in their communities and the decisions impacting their lives. I am here to testify in favor of An Act to Establish a Tax-free Savings Program for Individuals with Disabilities.

The ABLE Act provides opportunities for individuals with disabilities or their families the opportunity to establish tax deferred savings accounts to maintain their independence, pursue their dreams and contribute to their communities by allowing individuals to save up to \$14,000 per year to be used for qualified expenditures such as but not limited to education, transportation, assistive technology, employment training and support without becoming ineligible for means tested benefits such as SSI and Medicaid.

Developmental disabilities are serious lifelong disabilities affecting 3 or more areas of major life activity such as mobility, communication, and learning that require significant and ongoing services and supports. Mainers with developmental disabilities are overwhelmingly poor and rely upon Medicaid for health care as well as long term supports. Some of these services are not available through private health insurance nor even through private pay.

Take, for example, transportation. Lack of access to reliable, flexible transportation can significantly limit the employment, housing and social options for people with disabilities and private vehicles that are adapted for wheelchair users can cost tens of thousands of dollars more than a typical vehicle. The ABLE Act will allow individuals to save while maintaining the Medicaid eligibility that provides critical services.

A parent of a child with a significant disability spoke of having invested in college savings accounts for her other children and her wish that she could provide similarly for her child with the disability without fearing that doing so would impact needed services.

The DD Council strongly supports Maine's enabling this important option and appreciates Rep Pouliot's introducing this bill. Thank you for this opportunity to speak.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rachel Dyer', with a large, stylized flourish at the end.

Rachel Dyer

Maine Developmental Disabilities Council