



WALK FOR AUTISM
pg. 5



MINECRAFT THE MOVIE
Sensory Showing pg. 5

Spring 2025
Edition

Maine

Autism



Connections

The 132nd Legislature and Federal Updates

ASM Legislative Committee
by J. Richardson Collins

Things seem to be changing daily and ASM will try to keep our families, Autistic adults and professionals updated by either emailing our list serve, posting information on Facebook. If you have not signed up under either of those, please sign up to receive the latest updates. [Facebook](#) or [Email List - The Autism Society of Maine](#)



There is a lot happening in our State and within the Federal Government currently. Keeping up with local bills and Federal Executive orders has everyone trying to predict the future. Currently, we have put together the following information around the 132nd Maine Legislature, the Maine Supplemental and Biennial Budget and Federal updates.

The 132nd Legislature

This full session of the 132nd Maine Legislature, as forecast in my last newsletter article, is busy and fast-paced. Many of the LDs flagged by the ASM and recorded in our 132nd Legislative Full (January – June) Session Tracking (available on the [ASM Legislation page](#)) will remain in monitor status as bills key to the work of the ASM are reviewed and responded to more closely for collaboration with other interested parties and/or testimony before the legislature. Already this session, the ASM has provided testimony in favor of the following bills.

Article continues on page 3.



President's Message

Maine Autism Connections
A publication of the
Autism Society of Maine

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Greetings and Salutations!

I hope this message finds you well! As I sit at my desk to write, the forecasted weather is to be 45 degrees today and I, like many Mainers, am excited for the snow to melt and happily welcome the start of Spring! With Spring comes the sprouting of leaves and flowers, delightful pastel colors, revisiting the parks and local ice cream shops, and Autism Awareness Month in April.



I am excited to share that the Autism Society of Maine will be hosting the 23rd Annual Walk for Autism in Bangor and Westbrook.

This year's theme is "May the 4th be with You!", and the walk at Bangor Waterfront Park is scheduled for Sunday, April 27, 2025, and at Westbrook River Bank Park on Sunday, May 4, 2025. I am so excited to see the hundreds of you who come to participate and enjoy seeing families, self-advocates, and the sea of colorful team t-shirts!!! I encourage you to register for your local walk on the Autism Society of Maine website. Come join us for music, popcorn, face painting, games, prizes, local vendors, and donning your favorite Star Wars costume!

As of late, the Autism Society of Maine has received calls and inquiries from adults and parents regarding how to advocate for educational support, social services, and accessing resources. Not only can the ASM provide support through conversation, advocacy, and connecting to a, Autism Information Specialist, but also by offering webinars and videos on our YouTube channel. @AutismSocietyofME has posted a plethora of videos I encourage you to scroll through videos of past and present, to explore what is available and could answer any of your lingering questions or queries. **See Page 5.**

I wish all of you the best as the seasons change and we eagerly await summer. I look forward to seeing you at the walks in Bangor and Westbrook! Come join us in April and May to celebrate Autism Awareness Month and May the 4th be with You!

Sincerely,
Melissa Ponce, ASM Board President

ASM's Mission Statement

The Autism Society of Maine creates connections, empowering everyone in the Autism community with the resources to live fully.

This material is being provided for informational purposes only. ASM does not endorse or provide any specific therapies or treatments for Autism Spectrum Disorders. ASM has not validated and is not responsible for any information, events, or services provided by third parties. The views and opinions expressed on our website do not necessarily reflect the views of ASM. If you elect to use providers listed in the material, you assume any risks in doing so, and you are urged to check references and perform your own assessment of the efficacy and risks involved.

The 132nd Legislature and Federal Updates

Continued from cover

- [LD 46 \(HP 10\)](#), [An Act to Establish a Grant Program to Increase Postsecondary Educational Opportunities for Students with Intellectual or Developmental Disabilities or Autism Spectrum Disorder \(EMERGENCY\)](#).
- [LD 71 \(HP 35\)](#), [An Act Regarding Special Education Funding \(which would require the state to provide the same 55% of funding for special education as it does for general education\)](#).

We also are preparing testimony in opposition to LD 165 (HP 98), An Act to Allow School Boards to Expel or Suspend Students Regardless of Grade Level. Additional LDs being considered more closely for upcoming and anticipated public hearings are:

- [LD 169 \(HP 102\)](#), [An Act to Amend the Laws Regarding Estate Recovery and Planning for Long-term Care](#),
- [LD 258 \(SP 125\)](#), [Resolve, to Establish a Program to Recruit and Retain Behavioral Health Clinicians, and](#)
- [LD 769 \(SP 327\)](#), [An Act Regarding Access to Behavioral Health Supports for Adults with Certain Disabilities \(DEPARTMENT BILL\)](#).

You always may review testimony submitted by the ASM by visiting our Legislation page or as posted on the corresponding LD pages of the Maine State Legislature site.

The Maine Supplemental and Biennial Budgets

In addition to tracking general legislative activity, the ASM also is monitoring and addressing where possible the current supplemental and biennial budget processes. While the biennial budget process still is underway, the supplemental budget has been voted out of the House as “ought to pass as amended,” and is expected at the time of this writing to pass as such out of the Senate. The amendment – which strikes the emergency language from the bill – reflects passage of the bill without the 2/3 majority needed for it to be enacted as emergency legislation. Essentially, this means that the supplemental budget will pass as [LD 209 \(HP 131\)](#), [An Act to Make Supplemental Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and to Change Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government](#); to be enacted 90 days after passage. As such, funding for the budget allocations will not be available before the end of the current fiscal year. This will create a shortfall in available funds for MaineCare payments for mid-March through June. The DHHS post [Attention Providers: Update on Capping of MaineCare Payment Cycle](#) provides an update (as of the end of February) regarding the Office of MaineCare’s plan for processing payments in the interim. The statement in part reads:

This strategy is an attempt to avoid pausing all payments for providers who rely largely or entirely on Medicaid for their revenue for the last several weeks of the fiscal year.

As a reminder, the Department plans to take the following action:

- Pay hospital prospective interim payments (PIPs) at 70 percent the normal level;
- Hold payment for all hospital claims greater than \$50,000;
- Hold payment for large retail pharmacies and large durable medical equipment suppliers; and;
- Hold payment for out-of-state providers of hospital, ambulance, pharmacy, and durable medical equipment services.

Beyond this, the Department plans to employ measures to protect, to the extent possible, providers who are most dependent on MaineCare revenue. For other provider and claim types, every week the Department will set a cap on payments based on available funding and will pay “first in first out” based on date and time of submission, up to the weekly cap.

In the next few days, as it is finalized, we will send more detail about how providers will know if they will receive payment in a given week. (as extracted March 4, 2025)

The 132nd Legislature and Federal Updates

Continued from page 3

The ASM will provide updated status concerning the supplemental and biennial budgets as available, particularly as we monitor and address the status of funding for rate setting for DSPs and the COLAs as enacted last session. While LD 210 (HP 132), An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2025, June 30, 2026 and June 30, 2027 (EMERGENCY) contains language that effectively eliminates funding for both of these aspects, testimony during the public hearing for the corresponding section of the budget spoke strongly of the need for such funding to be appropriated and that the work of last session to address pay equity be honored. These aspects of the budget now are in work session for recommendations from and action by the Health and Human Services (HHS) committee.

Federal Updates

Along with activities concerning the 132nd Maine Legislature, the ASM continues its involvement with the Autism Society of America (ASA) in keeping up with federal actions and updates. As you may realize much is in flux and many aspects of consideration are not yet known. At the time of this writing, Medicaid, the IDEA, and 504 all are fully in place without change to the Department of Education (DOE) or the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). While there are many proposals that have been referenced concerning funding cuts, program realignments, and department(s) elimination/reorganization, no such changes are in place. The previously reported funding freeze presently is not in place. Although some entities (such as Head Start) have reported difficulties drawing down payments, the Medicaid system is operational and available. For more insight into the ASA's position regarding IDEA and Medicaid the following sign-on letters issued by the Consortium for Constituents with Disabilities (CCD) are available.

- [urging Congress to protect Medicaid funding](#)
- [in advance of the nomination hearing for Linda McMahon for United States Secretary of Education](#)

Additionally, the [ASA has created a Medicaid Action Alert to assist with contacting members of Congress](#) and is conducting a [survey to gather stories of the impact of proposed Medicaid cuts](#).

While there is much activity at both the state and federal levels, changes are occurring on a daily basis, and much remains unknown about anticipated changes, the ASM will continue to stay informed, work collaboratively with other entities, provide testimony to the legislature, and be a source of information for members and other interested parties.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the ASM Board of Directors and Legislative Committee,

J. Richardson Collins, MTS, MSW
Community Outreach Liaison

SENSORY FRIENDLY MOVIE SHOWINGS

Auburn and Orono - April 5th



This FREE movie event is open to anyone with Autism & their families. 1hr. 41 min. Rated PG


The movie will be closed to the general public

RESERVED SEATING REQUIRED. SCAN TO REGISTER:

RSVP by 4/2/2024 you can also call 1-800-273-5200 or email info@asmonline.org



FREE ADMISSION! Until full



April 5th
Black Bear Cinemas
6 Stillwater Ave., Orono
Movie starts at 10:30am
You can arrive at 10:00am



April 5th
Flagship Cinemas
730 Center St. Auburn
Movie starts at 9:00am
You can arrive at 8:30am

Sponsored by:
Autism Society of Maine

Sponsored by:
**John F. Murphy Homes
& Lewiston-Auburn Rotary**

Webinars featuring a variety of topics:

ASM's YouTube Channel

Continued from page 2

- Coffee with Cathy
- Autism and Online Safety (full-length program).
- Fundraising events.



Webinars featuring a variety of topics, including:

- Crisis Support
- Transitions
- The Basics of an IEP
- Able Accounts in Maine
- Social Skills Training
- Managing Feelings
- ASD and Mental Health
- Social Stories
- Legislation

APRIL ACCEPTANCE MONTH

The connection is YOU.

ASM offers various opportunities for individuals and families to connect, attend events, receive support, and share their experiences with others in their communities.



Acceptance

starts with understanding that everyone's experiences are valid.

Host a Hearts Campaign

For a \$1 donation, people can purchase a paper heart to write their name or a loved one's name on. Display it in your office, business, or storefront to spread love and support! ASM provides the hearts—you collect donations and send a check at the end. It's that simple!

How you can make a difference

Share our resources and posts about Autism on your social channels, create a Facebook fundraiser, join ASM's membership, start an Autism group, get involved with fundraising events, volunteer. There are many ways to contribute! [ASM Calendar of events](#) See more links at the below.

[HEART CAMPAIGN](#)

[AAM RESOURCES](#)



[JOIN OUR MEMBERSHIP](#)

[MAKE A DONATION](#)

A Special "Thank You" for the thoughtful people that created a Facebook fundraiser to raise donations for ASM. We appreciate you sharing your special day with us!

Mid - December thru February Facebook Birthday Fundraisers hosted by:

Todd Delaney, Taniesha Jean-Conley, Alexis Dunham, Lauren Weston, David DiTomaso, Katie Robinson-Call, Amber Heidle, Hailey Adams and Sammie Lynn.

[Learn more about Facebook Fundraising](#)

Thank You

8th Annual Fall Conference

The 8th Annual Fall Conference on November 1, 2025, is an annual conference that is provided to Autistic adults, parents/guardians, youth, schools, and professionals. The conference offers a keynote speaker in the morning and 6 breakout sessions in the afternoon. Each breakout is 1 ½ hours long. The conference space allows up to 400 in attendance. There are various vendors for the attendees to gather information in a variety of topics.

This year there is a change with the venue, ASM will charge a small fee \$25 to attend and with that cost you will be provided a box lunch. There have been some concerns with participants having to eat outside along the walkway due to the conference venue policy of no outside food can be brought into the conference. There will be a limited number of scholarships available if this is a hardship for you.

We are looking for presenters of the breakout sessions. If you have an idea that you believe our Autistic Adults, parents/guardians, youth, schools or professionals would be interested in learning about please [fill out this form](#) and submit it to ASM by May 15 and our education committee will review the request and inform you if your breakout was accepted by the end of May.

We also have a new platform we will be using to register for the conference. Registration will not open until September.



Maine Home Education Alliance (MHEA) conference

The Autism Society of Maine (ASM) will be at the Maine Home Education Alliance (MHEA) conference at the Augusta Civic Center on May 2nd and 3rd. As part of the event, MHEA is excited to offer a Sensory Play Space in the Diverse Learner Wing, created in collaboration with ASM and Maine CITE. The Maine CITE and ASM will also be hosting breakout sessions during the conference. This fun, inclusive space will give families and their children a place to play and unwind while attending the conference.

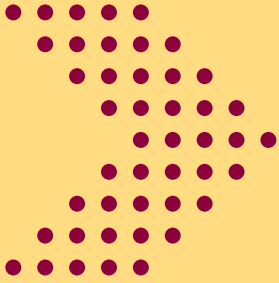
Alongside the Sensory Play Space, there will be a Community Resource Fair in an adjoining room, featuring agencies that support diverse learners. This is in addition to a variety of other vendors at the conference. The event is designed for anyone involved in homeschooling. Both MHEA and ASM have noticed an increase in parents seeking resources and opportunities for their neurodiverse children, and through the Diverse Learner Wing, we aim to help fill that gap. The wing will also include a quiet room for those who may feel overstimulated, offering a one-stop space to network, play, gather resources, and regulate.

Families are allowed to come and go as they need—whether it's for 15 minutes or a few hours, the choice is yours. The quiet space is available for anyone needing a calming retreat from the hustle and bustle of the conference. Many members of our team, as well as some of our vendors, have experience of homeschooling children with diverse learning needs and are looking forward to connecting with you! Learn more and register at [Maine Home Educators Conference](#).



Autism Society of Maine's Annual

Family Retreat



STANDISH, ME

What a way to kick off your Summer! ASM will host our annual Family Retreat at St. Joseph's College in Standish on June 20th, 21st and 22nd.

The purpose of this weekend is to provide a relaxing, fun weekend for the whole family. This year's Retreat will be "Around the World" When you register the kids will receive their "passport" and will have the opportunity to collect stamps from different countries throughout the weekend.

Feel free to wear your favorite travel or tourist clothes or something that represents your favorite place! Along with the usual fun activities- swimming, the rock wall, crafts, outdoor fun and other great things, we will be having our usual Family Fun night on Friday, June 20th and entertainment for Saturday night TBA. This weekend is always a great time for our families, there are educational discussions, lectures, a painting class or just some time for parents to relax while your kids are busy having fun with their friends and our amazing respite providers! Applications for the retreat will be available April 1st, look for more info on our FaceBook page and our website.

If you have any questions, please call the office at 800-273-5200 or email offassist@asmonline.org



Walk for Autism



May the 4th Be With You!







The Autism Society of Maine's Walk for Autism is more than just a fundraising event; it is a powerful movement that unites communities in support of individuals and families affected by Autism. Since its beginning in 2003 this annual walk has evolved into one of the most significant fundraising events for Autism in Maine.

The impact of this event is different for each person who attends. We all have our own story of how Autism has touched our lives, whether with a family member, employment, a friend or with ourselves, as an Autistic Adult.

Along with fun activities, vendors, games, face painting, snacks, music and STAR WARS theme! Please join us as we Walk together to promote inclusion and acceptance for everyone on their Autism journey.

If you want to be sure to get your awesome t-shirt, please register by April 11th. After this date we cannot guarantee you'll get one! [Register Today!](#)

**Registration and begins at 10:30am and the Walk begins at 12:00 noon
Rain or Shine!**

-  **FREE Games**
-  **Kids Prizes**
-  **Vendors**
-  **T-Shirts**
-  **DJ and Music**
-  **Snacks & Drinks**



Sunday, April 27th
BANGOR
Waterfront Park

Sunday, May 4th
WESTBROOK
River Bank Park

Donations / Sponsorships / Employee Matches / Grants

Harvey Dyer- Renewal By
Anderson
Bangor Savings Bank
Webster Lodge 164 AF & AM
People's Choice Credit Union
American Legion Auxilliary Unit 75
Widgeon Point Charitable
Foundation
Jeffrey & Joyce
Evelyn Lutz
Ted Vaughan
Karen & Terry Johnson
Benjamin Liess, ENT
Just Friends Hair Design
William Perna
Bachman Industries



Foothills Flooring & Tile
Bachman Industries
Foothills Flooring & Tile
Christian McCarthy
Wade Brainerd
The Libra Foundation
Bob's Discount Furniture
Spurwink
Front Street Shipyard
Woodfords Family Services
United Way of Kennebec Valley
Heartleaf ABA
Maine Behavioral Health
Living Innovations
Adele and Roland Martel
Sanford Lodge of Elks # 1470



In honor of:

Jessica Lang *by Anonymous*

"Thank you for all that you do to create greater awareness of Autism in our community, especially in D2!"

Emelia Ferguson
by Jeff Ferguson



New Memberships

Stephanie Soucy

Membership Renewals

Evelyn Lutz
Melissa Fanjoy
Christina Jordan
Sue Heel
Children's Odyssey
Mary Bishop
Debra Larwin-Pennesi
Minna Brewster

