



January 13th, 2026

Honorable Chairman Noble
NH House Education Policy and Administration Committee
Subject: Testimony in Favor of 1507

My name is Louis Esposito, and I serve as the Executive Director of ABLE NH, New Hampshire's statewide grassroots organization working to advance inclusion, access, and full participation for people with disabilities. In that role, I work closely with families, educators, and school districts across the state to understand how school policies shape students' daily experiences. I also come today as a former supportive education teacher and paraprofessional, and as a doctoral-level researcher in Educational Leadership focused identity, belonging, and long-term outcomes for students with disabilities.

I submit this testimony in strong support of HB 1507. Although this bill may appear simple, it addresses one of the most persistent sources of inequity in education: whether the school day is designed around the real needs of children's bodies, minds, and nervous systems.

Recess is not a break from learning. For many students, it is what makes learning possible. Research shows that recess supports emotional regulation, peer connection, and readiness to engage in classroom activities (McNamara et al., 2017). These benefits are especially important for students who experience disability, including those with attention differences, sensory processing differences, anxiety, trauma histories, mobility impairments, or communication disabilities. When these students are required to sit for extended periods without meaningful opportunities to move, socialize, and reset, they are placed at a structural disadvantage.

HB 1507 is particularly important because it treats recess as a protected form of access rather than a reward. This is critical because disabled students are disproportionately disciplined for behaviors that are often expressions of stress, sensory overload, or unmet needs rather than willful misconduct. Removing recess in response to these behaviors creates a harmful feedback loop in which students lose one of the most effective tools they have for self-regulation, making future learning even more difficult.

Qualitative research with children experiencing disability demonstrates how deeply recess affects belonging and well-being. Children describe recess as the primary time

when friendships form, when they feel part of the school community, and when they can engage in play on their own terms (Rubuliak & Spencer, 2022). However, these same children also describe being excluded from games, arriving late because of accessibility barriers, or losing meaningful time outdoors due to rigid schedules and physical obstacles. When recess is short, inconsistent, or taken away, those losses are magnified.

HB 1507 responds to these realities by guaranteeing enough time for recess to be genuinely accessible. A 45- to 60-minute recess period allows for a wide range of play styles, including active movement, imaginative play, conversation, rest, and social connection. Research shows that children value recess not only for physical activity, but for the opportunity to build relationships and experience a sense of belonging (McNamara et al., 2015; Rubuliak & Spencer, 2022). Longer, protected recess time allows more students, especially those who need additional time to navigate physical or social barriers, to participate fully.

The bill's definition of recess as unstructured, peer-to-peer outdoor play, with allowance for assistive or communication devices when required by a student's IEP or Section 504 plan (New Hampshire General Court, 2026), further strengthens its equity impact. This approach recognizes that students engage with play in diverse ways and that inclusion requires environments that are flexible rather than standardized. Research consistently shows that unstructured play supports social development, emotional regulation, and peer connection for children with and without disabilities (Brussoni et al., 2012; Spencer-Cavaliere & Watkinson, 2010).

Importantly, HB 1507 also keeps recess separate from physical education and academic instructional time (New Hampshire General Court, 2026). This reflects a growing understanding that movement, play, and learning are not competing priorities. Rather, they are interdependent. Students who are emotionally regulated, socially connected, and physically engaged are better able to focus, communicate, and learn when they return to the classroom (McNamara et al., 2017).

HB 1507 moves New Hampshire toward a school model that is designed around children rather than forcing children to conform to rigid systems. It affirms that access to movement, peer interaction, and outdoor play is not optional. It is foundational to meaningful education, particularly for students whose disabilities make traditional classroom structures more difficult to navigate.

Respectfully submitted,

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References

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