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Testimony of Whitney Files before
the Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs
in support of

**LD 1799: An Act to Expand Maine's High-quality Early Learning and Care for Children
by Increasing Public Preschool Opportunities in Communities**

May 10, 2023

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and honorable members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Whitney Files and I am the CEO of the Penobscot Bay YMCA located in Rockport, Rockland and North Haven. I support LD 1799: *An Act to Expand Maine's High-quality Early Learning and Care for Children by Increasing Public Preschool Opportunities in Communities*.

Collectively, the 15 YMCAs in Maine are the largest childcare provider in the state. We serve thousands of children in our early childhood education programs, before/after school programs, and summer camp. These programs provide children with safe, nurturing and enriching care, and are a critical component of our state's infrastructure to support working parents and our economy.

Unfortunately, the childcare system is under incredible strain. Our two childcare programs in Rockport and Rockland collectively serve 100 children, ages 6 weeks to 5 years. We offer full-day care from 7AM to 5PM for working families, and provide a high quality, safe and caring environment for young children to play, grow, share and learn. Every week, we speak with families who are in desperate need of care for their children and we are forced to place these children on lengthy wait lists. This leaves parents to make incredibly hard decisions around placing their children in unlicensed care, cutting back their work hours, or leaving the workforce altogether. Despite our best efforts, the system is failing Maine families.

The childcare system needs public investment to meet the needs of Maine families. LD 1799 would expand access to publicly-funded pre-K that better aligns with the needs of working families by leveraging the existing network of childcare programs across Maine. This is an efficient use of resources that also helps minimize disruption of care for children. Our Y would love to offer public pre-K to our community. Funding from the state would help to minimize costs for working parents, many of whom cannot enroll their children in public pre-K programs in our area because the programs end at 3PM (or even earlier). By collaborating with Ys and other providers to bring public pre-K into existing private childcare centers, we can offer better and more affordable full-day child care options for our community.

I urge you to vote ought to pass on LD 1799.

Respectfully submitted,

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