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LD 1799

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Testimony of Deborah Arcaro

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

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Deborah Arcaro. I was a state licensed family child care provider for 33 years before retiring in July '21. Prior to that I was a classroom teacher in the public school system for 10 years. I'm testifying 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.

The effort for Universal Public Pre-K for 4-year olds has left many in the child care field wondering what the impact will be on their businesses. I don't believe at this time the answer is clear. My hope is that LD 1799 may start to provide some answers and direction. It starts with the proposed annually report to the joint standing committee of the Legislature having jurisdiction over education matters on the department's initiatives, incentives and progress to expand public preschool programs.

From my own exploration and further discussions with my peers my understanding is that many school districts in Maine do not have the facility capacity to offer full-day (30 hr per week) pre-k to the 4-year old children within their district. Finding ways to partner with existing or new child care programs would help build capacity. It is important that the language in the Bill continues to clearly speak to this partnership. I also feel the establishment of a professional development and certification stakeholder working group is important. I would hope the professional development and certification stakeholder working group would be able to find ways to honor the experiences of those in the child care workforce in such a way as to find alternative routes to a credential equal to 081 that would allow partnering for Public Pre-K programing.

Here's my personal example:

If I was not at retirement age yet, I would have been very interested in partnering with my school district to offer public Pre-K within my licensed family child care.

I am:

- a level 8 on MRTQ Career Lattice(Bachelor in Elementary Ed & Master's Degree in Special Education);
- holding the current teacher certifications 020 K-8 and 282 / K-8 & 8-12;
- taught 10 yrs which included K-3 resource room, Grade 2, Grade 3, Grade 6;
- 33 years as a licensed family child care provider;
- 275 (27.5 CEU) Maine Roads Core Knowledge training hrs;
- 33 hrs (CEU) ECE related college course work; and
- 479.75 hrs of verified elective training hours in training relevant to ECE.

That doesn't include any Community of Practice participation, & co-facilitation; being a MRTQ trainer; training presentations at ECE conferences in Maine or training developed for the Family Child Care Association of Maine that are accepted for Licensing. None of this matters. Without the State of Maine 081 (birth-5) certification I am not seen as being qualified to teach a public pre-K program.

I know many providers who like me have tons of experience providing care to preschool age children, hours of trainings, MRTQ credentials, some also have teaching degrees, but none have the 081 certification. None of them can partner for Public Pre-K.

Working a fifty hour week offering direct care to infants through age 12, I would have little or no interest in earning another degree. I'd keep my fcc small business as it was. Parents of children reaching pre-k age could decide to stay in my program,

attend public pre-k and pay my fee to still have access to child care when needed or find alternative options for the care of their 4-year old outside of school hours. If national accreditation was an optional route I would consider that. I think other fcc providers would also do the same.

I feel the goal of Universal Public Pre-K for 4-years old is a good one. I encourage Maine to find ways to open up partnership possibilities with existing or future child care programs to best meet the needs of Maine's children and families. Please consider that many 4-year olds need child care outside of school hours. Child care availability is tight to nonexistent in many areas of the state. As small business owners providers will not be in the position to hold care slots open for those attending public pre-K when others are more than willing to fill them. What happens then to those public pre-K students outside school hours?

Thank you for your time and attention.