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Testimony of Tina Jennings 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 10th, 2023

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and honorable members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Tina Jennings and I'm Tina Jennings, Association Director of Community & Youth Engagement at the YMCA of Auburn-Lewiston. 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. The Ys have extensive waitlists of families trying to access care for their children. 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 YMCA serves 40 children ages 3-5 in our center-based Pre-K programs, and another 28 in our preschool rooms, between the hours of 7AM and 5:30PM. These hours allow working parents to commit to full day employment schedules, knowing that their children are receiving high quality care and education from staff who genuinely care about their children in a center-based setting. Including YMCAs in this endeavor will help working families by still allowing them to work FULL day schedules and know that their children are well cared for and given a high quality education to set them up for success in kindergarten and beyond.

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

Respectfully submitted,
Tina Jennings

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