



## Testimony Regarding LD 437 – An Act Directing the Department of Education to Develop Pilot Programs to Place Child Care Facilities in Selected School Administrative Units

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. My name is Heather Marden, Co-Executive Director of the Maine Association for the Education of Young Children. I am writing to provide testimony neither in support nor opposition to LD 436, "An Act Directing the Department of Education to Develop Pilot Programs to Place Child Care Facilities in Selected School Administrative Units." Instead, I wish to highlight important models that are already being implemented in Maine and to address some ongoing challenges within the child care and early education landscape.

The Department of Education (DOE) is building a new \$75.44 million elementary school in Skowhegan, starting in 2023. This project includes a pioneering early childhood wing, inspired by the Educare Central Maine model, making it the first of its kind in Maine. The DOE is funding most of the project, with a \$3 million fundraising campaign covering \$2.5 million for construction and \$500,000 for programming. The remaining \$2 million will come from a bond approved by Skowhegan voters. This new school, in partnership with Kennebec Valley Community Action Program, will serve children from birth to 11 years old, ensuring continuity in early education and care for local families. You can learn more about this project [here](#).

A new partnership between the Aroostook County Action Program (ACAP) and the Easton School Department aims to address the region's child care shortage, following the closure of two local daycares. Starting this fall, they will create a community education hub at Easton Elementary School, offering a full range of services, including daycare, for infants and children. By combining school and daycare services in one facility, the initiative hopes to make access easier for working parents and create a more financially sustainable model through pooled funding from various sources. More details on this initiative can be found [here](#).

We believe these existing, new models can serve as an opportunity for study into how communities can already consider child care gaps and bridge the continuity of care from birth through elementary school.

We must also recognize the significant challenges that still exist in bridging the continuity of care and education in our community and public school settings.

One systemic challenge facing the early education and child care sectors in Maine is the underinvestment in child care infrastructure. Waitlists for the **Child Care Affordability Program** reflect a high demand for affordable care that is not being met, while the low wages of child care educators contribute to high turnover rates and the difficulty of retaining qualified staff.

Additionally, background checks through both DHHS and DOE, as required federally, present barriers to child care and early education professionals. The current dual system, which requires background checks through both the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Department of Education (DOE), can create delays and redundancy for workers who are often required to undergo multiple checks, adding unnecessary time and complexity to the process. For professionals working in both early education and school settings, this can be a substantial barrier to timely employment, which is particularly problematic given the ongoing shortage of qualified child care professionals.

Furthermore, inconsistencies in professional development through DHHS and DOE have created challenges in the credentialing and certification of child care and early education workers. Maine's early childhood educator credentialing systems through DHHS and DOE are misaligned, creating barriers for educators. The MDOE's certification process does not easily recognize DHHS credentials, requiring educators to complete additional coursework or certification. This lack of alignment limits educators' mobility, contributing to workforce shortages and hindering professional development.

While LD 436 offers an important opportunity to explore how schools can help address child care gaps, it is essential that any efforts to implement pilot programs be grounded in an understanding of the ongoing systemic challenges within Maine's early education and child care infrastructure. Collaboration between schools and local child care providers, as seen in existing models such as Building Better Beginnings and the pilot programs in rural Maine, holds promise, but must be supported by addressing barriers such as the dual background check process, inconsistent professional development systems, and a lack of consistent investment in the child care sector.

Thank you for considering this testimony.