



Board of Directors

April 8, 2025

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Testimony of Nicholas Whiston

In support of: LD 1389 - BOOST Bill: Building Opportunities through Out of School Time.

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Our schools are wonderful institutions. And in my 20+ year career in education, I've always supported our public schools. I began my career as a public school teacher. But schools are only part of a larger puzzle when it comes to supporting our students. Out of School Time makes a proven impact in improving student outcomes, and indeed, for some young people, is dramatically more influential in their success.

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Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Nicholas Whiston and I am the program director at The Telling Room, a youth empowerment nonprofit organization here in Maine. I'm testifying in strong support of LD 1389 - BOOST Bill: Building Opportunities through Out of School Time.

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This bill offers a critical investment in the future of Maine's children, families, and workforce by expanding access to quality out-of-school time programming for youth ages 5 to 13. The kind of mentorship that young people get in after-school programs often can't be replicated during the school day, and frequently changes lives. But this bill isn't just about education. Here are just a few key reasons why this investment will pay off for Maine's future:

Joseph Conway
*Co-Founder, Sonar Digital
LLC*

Sara Crisp
Visual Artist

- **Health & Safety:** Afterschool programs reduce risky behaviors, provide access to healthy meals and snacks, and support physical activity. Research links these programs to fewer conduct issues, lower substance use, and greater social-emotional development.
- **Mentorship & Positive Relationships:** Caring adult mentors foster resilience, confidence, and a sense of belonging. Studies show that youth with mentors are significantly more likely to make healthy, productive life choices.
- **Beyond helping children thrive,** out of school time programs give parents peace of mind, allowing them to focus on work and contribute to the economy, knowing their children are safe, supported, and learning.
- **Academic success:** Afterschool programs provide structured time and support for children to complete homework in a focused environment

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So why make this investment in Maine?

The need for expanded out-of-school time programming is urgent and growing. In Maine, 70% of young children live in households where all available parents are working outside the home. While the state has focused attention and resources on the critical needs of early childhood education in recent years, families with elementary and middle school-age children still face major gaps in care during out-of-school hours. According to the National Afterschool Alliance, for every one child enrolled in an afterschool program in Maine, five more are waiting for a slot—a clear sign that demand far outpaces supply.

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This gap leaves working families with few safe, affordable options, especially in rural and underserved areas. Not surprisingly, 83% of Maine parents say that afterschool programs help them keep their jobs. Yet, programs consistently operate with waitlists for before- and afterschool care, vacation full-day programs, and summer day camps. There simply aren't enough programs or slots to meet the needs of Maine families. Additionally, the programs that exist struggle to meet the needs of the children in their care. Workforce challenges, children's mental and behavioral health needs, and space constraints mean that needs are going unmet.

In short, LD 1389 is not just an education or childcare bill—it is a workforce bill, a public health bill, and a youth development bill all in one. By passing it, Maine would be making a powerful commitment to equity, opportunity, and long-term well-being for children and families across the state.

I respectfully urge you to vote Ought to Pass on LD 1389. Thank you for your commitment to supporting Maine's working families and the future of our youth.

Sincerely,

Nicholas Whiston
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