



**maineaeYC**

Maine Association for the  
Education of Young Children

Testimony of Heather Marden, Co-Executive Director of the Maine Association for the  
Education of Young Children

In support of

LD 1689: An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Study  
Expansion of Public Preschool and Early Care and Education

5/1/2025

Thank you Representative Murphy, Senator Rafferty and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. My name is Heather Marden, and I serve as the Co-Executive Director of the Maine Association for the Education of Young Children (MaineAEYC). I am testifying in support of LD 1689: *An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Study Expansion of Public Preschool and Early Care and Education* and to respectfully urge the Committee to adopt the proposed amendments, which are essential to building an equitable, effective, and sustainable early childhood education system in Maine.

One of the most important aspects of this legislation is the recognition that publicly funded pre-K must be flexible and adaptable to the unique circumstances of Maine's diverse communities. Our state is geographically large and demographically varied, and public early education must be responsive to those differences. A one-size-fits-all approach simply does not work. Instead, this bill rightly emphasizes a mixed delivery model—one that includes public schools, child care centers, family child care providers, and Head Start programs as partners in delivering high-quality pre-K and early care.

When publicly funded pre-K does not include the settings that currently serve preschool aged children across Maine, we see unintended consequences such as closures of child care businesses, the inability for these programs to provide wrap around care for preschool aged children, and the ability for parents to have full day care for their young children during working hours.

Flexibility in program delivery ensures that communities can design systems that meet local needs and support working families. Many families rely on early care and education

providers for full-day, year-round care that goes beyond a traditional school schedule. Community-based programs are often best positioned to provide the flexibility, cultural responsiveness, and wraparound support that families need. When we ensure that publicly funded dollars are accessible to a range of settings that meet quality standards, we not only increase access to early education, but we also promote stability in the existing child care infrastructure.

This approach also recognizes the importance of equity in the use of public funds. All qualified providers—regardless of whether they operate in a school, center, home, or Head Start program—should have the opportunity to partner in delivering publicly funded pre-K. This inclusivity allows communities to build on existing relationships and strengths, close gaps in access, and ensure that children across the state, including those in rural and under-resourced areas, can benefit from high-quality early learning experiences.

While partnerships between school districts and community-based providers are a strong model, they may not always be feasible in every community due to geographic, capacity, or logistical challenges. In these cases, it is essential that funding be directly accessible to qualified child care programs—including child care centers, family child care homes, and Head Start programs—so they can independently offer publicly funded pre-K. Ensuring equitable access to funding regardless of partnership status allows more children to benefit from high-quality early education and supports the sustainability of local child care options where collaboration is not currently viable.

We also support language that allows state-funded school construction projects to include space for early childhood education. This is a smart and much-needed investment areas of Maine that have early care and education deserts. Many communities face facility challenges that limit the availability of quality care for young children. By enabling schools to partner with local providers and invest in shared infrastructure, we can expand access without duplicating efforts or displacing existing programs.

In addition, we urge support for the development of a unified early childhood educator credentialing system, jointly led by the Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services. This is a critical step toward reducing redundancy, clarifying career pathways, and ensuring that the early childhood workforce is recognized and supported across all settings. Professionals working with young children should be able to move between roles and settings without encountering unnecessary regulatory barriers or inconsistencies.

Finally, we support the proposed system-wide review of early childhood standards and regulations. Aligning and simplifying these requirements across programs will reduce confusion and administrative burden, allowing providers to focus more on delivering quality care and less on navigating duplicative rules.

These amendments reflect years of thoughtful collaboration among early childhood professionals, agencies, and stakeholders. They are grounded in research, informed by practice, and urgently needed to ensure that Maine's early childhood system can meet the needs of families, educators, and communities.

Thank you for your time, your leadership, and your commitment to Maine's children. I urge you to support this legislation and its proposed amendments.

## A MIXED-DELIVERY SYSTEM IS THE MOST SUSTAINABLE AND EFFICIENT SOLUTION TO MEET POLICY OBJECTIVES

A mixed-delivery system administers funds across licensed center- and family-based child care programs, Head Start, Early Head Start, public schools, and community-based organizations to ensure access to high-quality, affordable options for children through age five and their families.

An appropriately funded mixed-delivery system, which would draw on the decades of expertise and existing infrastructure in the early care and education sector is essential. It is the most cost-effective and sustainable solution to deliver affordable high-quality early care and education to all.

**A well-funded mixed-delivery system avoids disruptions to children and families and better facilitates a quality birth to five system of early care and learning**

### *Supports choice and flexibility for **families***

#### **Ensures flexible hours and year-round care**

Working families need access to options with hours that meet their needs.

Private providers offer full-year, full-day early care and education options from birth to five, unlike public Pre-K programs that do not typically support infants and toddlers and have more limited hours.

#### **Prioritizes equitable access and affordability**

Parents at all income levels and across geographies need the ability to choose which program is best suited for their children and family needs.

Alongside public counterparts, private providers ensure that numerous affordable options exist for children, especially in at-risk areas.

### *Ensures high-quality experiences for **children***

#### **Promotes educational continuity**

Children benefit from continuity of experience with the same caring adults throughout the day and year.

Private programs, whether center-, home-, or faith-based, provide a continuous experience for children and families across all working hours—which simultaneously benefits parents.

### *Protects diversity in the **provider** network*

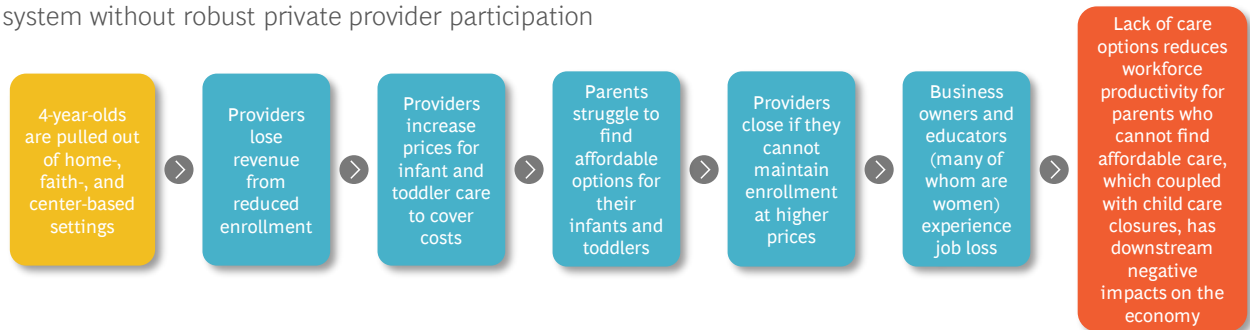
#### **Leverages essential infrastructure**

The private early care and education space is comprised of predominantly small businesses operated by women—and primarily by women of color.

These providers currently serve the majority of young children across a range of settings, both home- and center-based.

## THERE ARE SIGNIFICANT NEGATIVE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF LIMITED PRIVATE PARTICIPATION OR A PUBLIC-ONLY DELIVERY SYSTEM

Unintended consequences of a poorly designed system without robust private provider participation



### Affordability and program closures

If Pre-K children are displaced from their current programs, private providers would need to raise prices significantly for infants and toddlers, rendering these services unaffordable for many families. If providers cannot maintain enrollment at these higher prices, many will have no choice but to close their doors.

### Child care shortages

Widescale closures of private options would cause a massive shortage—beyond the shortages that already exist today in child care deserts across the country. Many private providers deliver wraparound care to school-age children, so a child care shortage would impact families with children of all ages.

### Impact on educators, small business owners, and the economy

Program closures and child care shortages would negatively impact the economy as industry jobs are lost (both providers and educators) and parents are forced to drop out of the workforce due to lack of adequate care options.

## We have seen these interrelated negative consequences play out across the country

### TULSA

In Tulsa, Oklahoma, where free public Pre-K accounts for the vast majority of preschool programming, costs of early care and education increased 33% overall from 2008 to 2018, with spikes of up to 55% for infants and toddlers. And from 2005 to 2018, 43% of all licensed early care and education providers in Oklahoma closed.

### CALIFORNIA

California saw the number of home-based-providers decrease by almost 30% from 2008 to 2016, largely due to the increase in state funded 4-year-old Pre-K programs. And ECEC analysis shows that if 4-year-olds are pulled out of their current settings as part of the expansion, providers anticipate having to raise prices in the 0-3 space by ~40%.

### NEW YORK CITY

In New York City, a system many see as the model for universal Pre-K, one study points to as much as a 20% reduction of available infant and toddler care after the implementation of universal 4-year-old Pre-K in 2014. Furthermore, all lost slots were found to be in high-poverty areas, and the decline was not offset by an increase in provision in the home day care market.