



STATE OF MAINE
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
23 STATE HOUSE STATION
AUGUSTA, ME 04333-0023

JANET T. MILLS
GOVERNOR

PENDER MAKIN
COMMISSIONER

May 1, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Senate Chair
Representative Murphy, House Chair
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Distinguished Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee:

LD 1689, An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Study Expansion of Public Preschool and Early Care and Education, would make several changes to the provision of early care and education for Maine's children, in line with the recommendations of the Commission to Study Expansion of Public Preschool and Early Care and Education (the Commission).

Currently, approximately 92% of Maine's school administrative units (SAUs) offer some amount of public Pre-K programming, however it is not a requirement for Maine SAUs to offer it. SAUs offering public Pre-K receive funding through Maine's Essential Programs and Services (EPS) formula for eligible 4-year-olds. The recent legislation adopted to shift FAPE responsibility for children ages 3-5 with identified special education needs to SAUs is an impetus for SAUs to start or expand public Pre-K. Provision of public Pre-K through inclusive settings in schools or through partnerships with licensed child care providers is strongly supported by the Maine Department of Education (DOE).

During the 131st Session, LD 1799 established the Commission to study public Pre-K in Maine and to make recommendations for supporting its expansion to universally serving eligible 4-year-olds. LD 1799 also directed the DOE to report annually to this Committee on the status of public Pre-K and expansion progress. The latest version of that report is attached to this Information Letter. Finally, LD 1799 directed the Maine DOE to develop, through a stakeholder working group, a plan to align the credentials and training earned through the Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development Network (MRTQ) with those earned through the Early Childhood Teacher (081) certification. The Pre-K Advisory Team, authorized through Maine's Preschool Development Grant (PDG) Renewal grant, is representative of a wide array of stakeholders with expertise related to credentialing, including Maine DOE and Maine Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), and will be providing recommendations as

part of its PDG work by December of 2025. Therefore, the work proposed in Sections 3 through 5 of LD 1689 is already underway within the DOE and among stakeholders, including representatives from DHHS. Furthermore, as the Committee is aware, certification rules are the purview of the State Board of Education, therefore any recommendations regarding certification changes must also involve that body.

Regarding the proposal to amend the EPS funding formula, there are some additional aspects to consider. In the current methodology, Pre-K calculations do not distinguish between half or whole day programs and use the most current year enrollment counts and projected enrollment estimates; this bill would change that for Pre-K to use two-year averages and no estimates. This could have the unintended consequence of disincentivizing Pre-K, because it would remove a support for expanding programs. As with all EPS-related changes, Maine's commitment to funding 55% of the total state-level cost of education, as opposed to 55% of the district-by-district cost of education, means that making any small change to EPS has ripple-effects that impact every SAU in the State. These decisions must be carefully weighed and are best considered in concert with the other proposed legislation regarding EPS this session, as well as the recommendations from MEPRI.

Another significant proposal within LD 1689 is the requirement for all new elementary school construction to require dedicated space for Pre-K instruction or child care. This proposal, while valuable, may increase the cost of school construction, at a time when the limited resources available cannot meet the strong demand from the field. This would impose further burden upon local municipalities' budgets when preparing for new elementary school construction. Furthermore, many SAUs have partnered with community providers to provide public Pre-K, a mutually beneficial practice that sustains the delicate balance of Maine's child care system. Mandating that new elementary school construction includes space for public Pre-K and/or child care could result in child care closures detrimental to infant and toddler care. Allowing communities to design their child care and early learning systems in ways that best fit their community's needs may be a more responsive approach.

The Department will be available to provide additional information on LD 1689 and respond to any questions during the upcoming work session.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:

Lee Anne Larsen

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Lee Anne Larsen

Director of Early Learning

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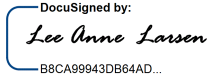
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