

## Testimony 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**

*Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs*

*Maine State Legislature*

*May 1, 2025*

Good morning Senate Chair Rafferty, House Chair Murphy, and members of the Joint Standing Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of LD 1689.

My name is Christine Frost-Bertinet, Assistant Superintendent with RSU 14 Windham-Raymond School District. I strongly support implementing the Commission's recommendations to expand access to high-quality early childhood education in Maine.

## **The Critical Importance of Early Childhood Education**

High-quality early childhood education yields significant benefits: improved school readiness, better academic performance, higher graduation rates, and increased lifetime earnings. These benefits are especially important for children from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Despite these benefits, many Maine communities lack sufficient options, with families facing barriers related to affordability, availability, and accessibility. The Commission's recommendations directly address these challenges.

## **Support for Commission Recommendations**

### **Recommendation 1: Enhanced Funding for Public Preschool**

I strongly support expanded Pre-K expansion grants as included in LD 1689. In RSU 14, these grants have helped us:

- Overcome start-up barriers by funding furniture, materials, and initial program costs
- Provide our community partners with resources to meet public pre-K standards
- Implement high-quality curriculum and family engagement strategies
- Establish sustainable programs that could later be maintained through ongoing funding

Expanded grants would help districts statewide—particularly in rural and underserved areas—replicate these successes by providing both start-up and operational support.

### **Recommendation 2: Increased Credential Flexibility**

Credentialing requirements have been a substantial hurdle in RSU 14:

- Potential community partners lacked staff with specific credentials required for public pre-K
- We faced a limited pool of candidates with required certification
- Differing requirements between DOE and DHHS created confusion for our partners

LD 1689's credentialing provisions would significantly enhance our ability to expand high-quality pre-K by creating multiple pathways to qualification, including alternative certification routes and recognition of diverse educational backgrounds.

### **Recommendation 3: Coordination and Outreach for Partnerships**

I strongly support funding dedicated positions for public/private pre-K partnerships. In RSU 14, we have established successful partnerships with:

- A local family childcare center offering a nature-based pre-K program
- An established local preschool specializing in inquiry-based and outdoor education

Creating these partnerships required significant effort to navigate regulatory requirements, develop agreements, and establish financial structures. Having dedicated coordinators would have accelerated implementation and reduced administrative strain.

The results of our mixed delivery model have been remarkable:

- 40% increased enrollment within two years
- Strong kindergarten readiness and social-emotional skills
- Positive family feedback
- Stronger community relationships
- Enhanced educational innovation across our system

The coordinator positions funded through LD 1689 would help districts statewide identify partners, navigate regulations, share best practices, and maximize resources—multiplying the impact of public pre-K funding by leveraging existing community resources.

### **Recommendation 4: Alignment of Standards and Rules**

Harmonizing standards across agencies would reduce administrative burdens, eliminate conflicting requirements, streamline monitoring, and focus resources on quality improvement rather than compliance with duplicative regulations.

## **Benefits of Mixed Delivery Models**

Our RSU 14 experience demonstrates that mixed delivery models provide:

- Greater family choice in educational approaches
- Stronger community connections
- Programming responsive to local needs
- Economic stability for independent providers
- Smoother transitions for children

## **Implementation Considerations**

I encourage the committee to:

- Prioritize sustainable funding mechanisms
- Ensure credentialing changes maintain quality standards
- Support mixed delivery models
- Consider nature-based and alternative pedagogical approaches
- Include ongoing evaluation

## Conclusion

LD 1689 offers a comprehensive approach to addressing Maine's early childhood education needs. High-quality early childhood education supports working families, builds educational foundations, strengthens our workforce, and creates stronger communities. I urge this committee to give LD 1689 a favorable report.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully submitted,  
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