



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Testimony of Whitney Files before
the Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs
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**
May 1, 2025

On behalf of the Penobscot Bay YMCA, I am submitting this testimony in support of efforts to expand public Pre-K access in Maine through inclusive, mixed-delivery models that involve community-based child care providers.

The Penobscot Bay YMCA has been a trusted provider of early childcare programs in our region for many years. Last year, we were proud to partner with RSU 13 to pilot a public Pre-K program housed at our Rockland YMCA branch. This program is unique in our district, as it is the only public Pre-K offering that includes after-school care from 3:00 to 5:00 PM and summer care—critical support for working families. All other public Pre-K programs in the district require children to be picked up mid-afternoon or take the bus home, creating barriers for parents trying to maintain full-time employment.

Our Pre-K program is nationally accredited by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) and has earned a 5-star rating through Maine's Quality Rating and Improvement System (QRIS). Like other similar providers in Maine, our experienced educators and quality facilities make us well-positioned to contribute meaningfully to the state's vision for expanded early learning.

As Maine considers the future of public Pre-K, we believe it is essential to include community-based providers like the YMCA in the expansion framework for the following reasons:

1. **We have the capacity and expertise.** Our classrooms are ready, our staff are trained, and we specialize in serving preschool-aged children.
2. **Working families need full-day, year-round options.** Most "full day" public school Pre-K programs end at 2:30 or 3:00 PM and do not operate during the summer. Providers like us bridge this gap for families.
3. **Public Pre-K is unintentionally destabilizing the broader childcare system.** As more 4-year-olds enroll in school-based programs, private centers are losing critical preschool enrollment. We are seeing this play out in the Rockport area with multiple early childcare providers, including our own Rockport childcare center. Due to age-based teacher-child ratios, this decline forces providers to raise rates for infant and toddler care—or risk closure.

To ensure sustainable, equitable expansion of public Pre-K in Maine, we strongly recommend the following:

- **Allow public Pre-K funds to follow the child**, enabling parents to enroll their children in accredited private programs that offer full-day care.
- **Provide direct funding support for providers who care for infants and toddlers under age 18 months**, to offset the financial losses incurred from declining preschool enrollment.
- **Ensure credentialing flexibility**, so that experienced early childhood educators without formal teaching degrees can continue serving in public Pre-K partnership classrooms.
- **Address reimbursement inequities**, such as the current USDA meal program rules that prevent school districts from receiving reimbursement when delivering meals to private Pre-K partner sites.
- **Increase support for children with special needs**, including additional state funding for one-on-one aides, especially in public Pre-K partnership classrooms.

Contact: Whitney Files, CEO, Penobscot Bay YMCA
P: 207.200.5931 **E:** wfiles@penbayymca.org



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Maine has an opportunity to expand access to high-quality Pre-K in a way that works for children, families, schools, and providers alike. A mixed-delivery approach—one that includes accredited, community-based programs—is key to making that vision a reality. We have seen the positive impacts of this thoughtful approach in other areas across the country, including New York City.

We urge you to ensure that any public Pre-K expansion includes strong partnerships with existing accredited providers, like the Penobscot Bay YMCA, who are already serving Maine's youngest learners and supporting working families every day.

Respectfully submitted,

Whitney Files
CEO
Penobscot Bay YMCA

Contact: Whitney Files, CEO, Penobscot Bay YMCA
P: 207.200.5931 **E:** wfiles@penbayymca.org