

## TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF

L.D. 1689

### AN ACT TO IMPLEMENT THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COMMISSION TO STUDY EXPANSION OF PUBLIC PRESCHOOL AND EARLY CARE AND EDUCATION

May 1, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Noonan Murphy, and members of the Joint Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, I am Robbie Feinberg, the Director of Communications and Government Relations of the Maine School Management Association, testifying on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and the Maine School Superintendents Association in support of L.D. 1689, An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Study Expansion of Public Preschool and Early Care and Education.

Preschool and early care are proven investments that boost student achievement and behavior while improving the lives of Maine's working families. L.D. 1689 seeks to address many existing barriers and make meaningful progress towards Maine's goal of universal pre-K access by 2026. Years of evidence have demonstrated that early education leads to better attendance, student achievement, graduation rates, and improved life outcomes for Maine youth.

This bill contains many provisions, but we wanted to highlight a few that we believe will advance important state goals:

#### Investing \$4 million in Pre-K Expansion Grants

Without assistance from the state, local schools cannot expand pre-K on their own. To create a program, schools need startup costs to renovate facilities, expand to other classrooms, and recruit staff members. L.D. 1689 makes that possible.

We understand the state's difficult financial position and limited resources, but we have firm evidence that investing in pre-K leads to positive results for students. From 2014-2019, Maine received federal funding for a similar expansion grant program as to what is proposed in L.D. 1689. The results [were impressive](#):

- *76%-86% of children moved out of the high-risk identification in all developmental domains*
- *76%-96% of children moved out of high-risk identification in literacy skills (predictive of kindergarten success)*
- *53% of children moved out of high-risk identification in the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test, which assesses receptive language and is a predictor of later reading success*

At a time when lawmakers are seeking to boost literacy rates for young children in Maine, these are the types of investments we should make – funding new early learning programs that have firm evidence of success.

### Adding Regional Coordinators to Work With Schools to Create Public Pre-K Partnerships

While many Maine schools want to increase public pre-K programming, they are limited by a lack of classroom space. One crucial strategy to overcome this challenge is for a district to work together with local partners and add classrooms in other community spaces. One example of a successful partnership is RSU 14 – the district has partnered with two local childcare centers to offer a range of pre-K options to residents, with a goal of eventually reaching universal pre-K access. This work requires careful outreach and collaboration between many groups, and this state assistance is badly needed to help more districts pursue this approach.

### Reviews of the EPS Funding Formula and Early Childhood Credentialing

The commission specifically highlighted these two issues as major areas for improvement, and we agree. Likely unintentionally, the current formula incentivizes half-day programming over full-day pre-K – we feel this should be addressed and would encourage any efforts to overcome these barriers that have made it harder for districts to implement pre-K within their classrooms.

Together, we believe the policies outlined in L.D. 1689 would represent significant progress towards Maine's goals of universal pre-K access, and we urge you to support this bill.