

To Representative Hasenfus, Senator Pierce and the Esteemed members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

My name is Meghann Carrasco. I reside in Westbrook, Maine and am the Executive Director of a nonprofit organization in Gorham, ME who participates in partnering with the Gorham Public School Department to offer equitable access to Public Pre-K in our district. I am writing to you in full support of LD 1689: The Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Study Expansion of Public Preschool and Early Care and Education.

Additionally, I am on the Public Pre-K Advisory Council and have worked closely with MaineAEYC to support partnerships across the State. I have seen first hand how important it is for children of all backgrounds to have access to Public Pre-K and I also understand that there are programs already in place who offer quality education outside of the school district for this age group. Mixed delivery is an ideal approach to expanding Public Pre-K and preschool services across the state.

When we consider a one-size-fits-all approach, it won't meet the diverse needs of Maine communities—especially rural ones. Additionally, if we continue to grow Public Pre-K programming within school districts, we will put vital businesses for infant & toddler programming out of business, further burdening working families. A mixed delivery approach ensures children can access quality Pre-K in various settings: public schools, Head Start, private providers, and licensed home care. This inclusivity supports family's needs and leverages the capacity of Maine's existing early care infrastructure. Investing in a mixed model prevents displacement of existing providers while still expanding access.

Furthermore, Maine communities face significant gaps in infant and toddler care—the opportunity to expand child care infrastructure in school partnerships allows districts to help address them *without competing* with existing providers. Conversely, where there are qualified child care programs that can provide public Pre-K services and they are unable to obtain a partnership with their school district, there needs to be equitable access to funding to provide those public Pre-K services and support the children and family needs.

We also need to address the issue of qualifications for early childhood providers. Maine's current dual-agency system for certification is fragmented, duplicative, and burdensome for the workforce. The state has already laid groundwork through PDG (Preschool Development Grant) working groups—now is the time for action. A unified system will promote workforce mobility, cross-sector consistency, and reduce barriers to entry for qualified educators. An aligned credentialing system shows respect for early childhood professionals and fosters recruitment and retention.

We need to come together and offer regulations that bridge the gap between Chapter 124, the Department of Education Regulations and the Rules & Regulations for Childcare Providers in the State of Maine. Differing regulations across settings create inefficiencies, barriers, and

confusion—especially for programs operating in multiple systems. Alignment allows providers to meet quality standards without redundant reporting or costly compliance burdens. This systems-level approach strengthens mixed delivery and improves the sustainability of early childhood programs across the board. It supports shared goals of high-quality care while ensuring flexibility in how that quality is delivered.

We are in dire need of addressing the issue of public access to preschool, especially on the precipice of CDS rolling into the municipalities and school districts. Offering a mixed delivery model that meets the needs across early childcare and the department of education would be beneficial for the State of Maine. Please consider supporting this bill.

I appreciate your time,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mc', with a stylized flourish extending to the right.

Meghann Carrasco
Executive Director
Seedlings to Sunflowers