

Jenn Caron
Coastal Kids Preschool
LD 2114

Testimony on LD 2114

An Act Regarding Public Preschool Programs Serving Children Who Are 3 Years of Age

I believe deeply that every child in the state of Maine deserves the opportunity to learn, grow, and thrive. Expanding access to early learning is a goal I wholeheartedly support. However, access must not come at the expense of quality—or at the cost of destabilizing the broader birth-to-five system that families rely on.

LD 2114 expands public Pre-K eligibility to include 3-year-olds. While this may increase access for some families, without corresponding investment in infant and toddler care, it risks weakening the mixed-age child care model that makes high-quality early education financially viable. Preschool classrooms often help offset the significantly higher costs of caring for infants and toddlers. When those classrooms are pulled into public systems without adequate funding offsets, programs are forced to raise tuition, reduce capacity, or close altogether.

Even the highest-quality child care programs—including those rated Rising Stars Level 5—are operating on extremely thin margins. Many cannot afford to offer health insurance or retirement benefits, are navigating the loss of temporary federal funding, and are competing within an increasingly crowded and limited grant pool. Any policy change that further draws from this system without stabilizing it puts quality, workforce retention, and long-term sustainability at serious risk.

We have already seen unintended consequences from previous public Pre-K expansion, including reduced infant and toddler capacity and increased strain on providers. Extending this model to 3-year-olds—without structural safeguards—will likely accelerate these challenges, increase costs for working families, and deepen Maine’s child care shortage.

I want all Maine children to have access to early learning opportunities. But that access must be built on a sustainable, well-funded, birth-to-five system that protects quality, supports the workforce, and meets the real needs of families.

I urge the Legislature to proceed thoughtfully with LD 2114 and to pair any expansion of public Pre-K with meaningful investment in infant and toddler care, workforce stabilization, and community-based early childhood programs—so access and quality can grow together.

Respectfully,
Jenn Caron