



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Testimony of Whitney Files before
the Education & Cultural Affairs Committee
Neither in support or against

LD 2114: An Act Public Preschool Programs Serving Child Who Are 3 Years Old

January 22, 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to offer this testimony on LD 2114. I am neither for nor against this bill, but I come here to offer insight and share concerns.

As child care providers, we strongly support the goal of universal, publicly funded early childhood education. Public preschool provides clear benefits to children and families, and we appreciate the Legislature's commitment to expanding access to early learning. At the same time, we wish to share important context about how recent preschool expansion, when not paired with investment in infant and toddler care, has created unintended consequences for Maine's child care system.

Over the past three years, enrollment of 4-year-olds has largely shifted from community-based child care providers into preschool classrooms in public schools. For most providers, revenue from preschool classrooms has historically helped offset the significantly higher costs of operating infant and toddler care, which requires lower staff-to-child ratios and higher staffing expenses. As preschool enrollment has shifted to public schools, child care providers in our area have lost this critical revenue stream, making infant and toddler rooms financially unsustainable. Many programs are now running deficits and face the difficult decision to reduce care or close their classrooms for young children.

This pattern has been documented nationally. A recent analysis by *The Hechinger Report* examining preschool expansion in Los Angeles found that free public preschool, without sufficient investment in the broader child care system, contributed to declining enrollment and financial instability among community-based providers, ultimately reducing access to infant and toddler care (<https://hechingerreport.org/proof-points-la-preschool/>)

We are now seeing similar outcomes in Maine. Last year, Island of Imagination Early Learning Center in Bar Harbor announced its closure despite receiving approximately \$250,000 in federal startup funding. The program cited unexpectedly low enrollment of four-year-olds following the expansion of public pre-K in the local school system, along with ongoing financial losses. This closure underscores how fragile the child care system has become.

We recognize that the state faces fiscal constraints. However, expanding funding for 3- and 4-year-olds without simultaneous investment in care for children ages birth to two risks further destabilizing the sector. The likely outcomes include provider deficits, infant and toddler classroom closures, higher prices for families, and continued workforce instability.

One potential solution is a per-child operating stipend for licensed child care providers serving infants and young toddlers. A predictable, per-child investment—similar in structure to stabilization funding used during the COVID era—would help counterbalance the loss of preschool revenue and reflect the true cost of infant and toddler care. This approach would allow providers to maintain capacity for our youngest children while the state continues to expand public preschool.

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We support public preschool and the benefits it brings to children and families. We simply urge that these efforts be advanced as part of a comprehensive, birth-to-five strategy that ensures child care providers can remain viable at every age level.

Thank you for considering this perspective and for your continued attention to the long-term health of Maine's early childhood education system.

Sincerely,

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