

Testimony in Support of LD 2064 An Act to Expand Access to Early Childhood Nutrition by Establishing a Grant Program for Public Preschools

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Honorable Members of the Health and Human Services Committee

February 5, 2026

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Honorable Members of the Committee:

My name is Christine Frost-Bertinet, and I am the Assistant Superintendent for RSU 14, which serves the communities of Windham and Raymond. I am writing today to express my strong support for LD 2064: An Act to Expand Access to Early Childhood Nutrition by Establishing a Grant Program for Public Preschools.

In RSU 14, we have worked diligently to develop a high-quality mixed delivery public pre-kindergarten model that meets the diverse needs of our families. This model allows us to expand access to pre-k by partnering with three local community-based early childhood programs, enabling us to serve more children than our district buildings alone could accommodate. We are proud of this collaborative approach, and it has proven successful in providing excellent early learning experiences for our youngest students.

However, we face a significant and troubling inequity: the children enrolled in our public pre-k program who attend classes at our partner sites cannot receive school meals, while those attending pre-k in our district buildings can. This disparity exists not because we lack the capacity or willingness to serve these children, but solely because federal regulations prohibit us from doing so. Our school nutrition program is well-equipped and ready to deliver our outstanding breakfasts and lunches to our partner sites. We have the infrastructure, the expertise, and the commitment to ensure that every public pre-k student has access to nutritious meals, regardless of where their classroom is located.

This regulatory barrier creates an unjust two-tiered system within our own pre-k program. Young children attending public pre-k programs, taught by equally qualified and certified teachers, receive vastly different support simply based on their classroom location. For families already navigating food insecurity, this gap can be devastating. Early childhood nutrition is not merely a convenience; it is foundational to learning, development, and lifelong health.

LD 2064 offers a practical, commonsense solution. By establishing a grant program to support public preschools in providing meals to students at partner sites, this legislation would eliminate the inequity we currently face and ensure that all public pre-k students have equal access to nutrition. It would allow districts like RSU 14 to fully support our mixed delivery models and serve all children equitably.

Our communities have invested significantly in early childhood education because we understand its transformative impact. It is both unjust and illogical to exclude some of our most vulnerable students from the nutritional support they need to thrive simply because of where they sit during the school day.

I urge this committee to support LD 2064 and help us close this gap. Every public pre-k student in Maine deserves access to healthy meals, and this bill will make that possible.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully submitted,

Christine Frost-Bertinet
Assistant Superintendent
RSU 14 (Windham and Raymond)