

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**

2/5/2026

My name is Hannah Marshall, and I am the Director of Space to Thrive, providing a birth-through-five early childhood center and before and after school programs in Windham and Raymond communities. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in support of this bill.

Space to Thrive serves 24 public pre-K children through a partnership with RSU 14. We are proud to be part of Maine's mixed-delivery public pre-K system and to work closely with our local school district to provide high-quality early learning experiences for young children.

However, one of the most significant challenges we face is access to meals for the public pre-K children we serve.

Our program is located just down the road from the RSU 14 school. The district would *love* to transport free school meals—breakfast and lunch—to our site for the children enrolled in public pre-K. Unfortunately, federal child nutrition regulations prevent this kind of sharing of resources, even though the children are publicly funded and enrolled through the school district.

Because of these federal restrictions, and without a state solution to bridge the gap, our program's budget does not allow us to provide breakfast and lunch to our public pre-K children. We do our best to offer a small snack each day to support children's needs, but families are required to send meals from home.

This situation feels deeply inequitable. It exposes the fractures and silos in how we serve publicly funded children differently based solely on the setting in which their classroom happens to be located. A four-year-old attending a school-based pre-K classroom receives meals, while a four-year-old attending a community-based public pre-K partnership does not—even though both children are part of the same public education system.

A four-year-old deserves to eat, regardless of early childhood setting.

This proposed grant program would make a real and immediate difference for our program and the families we serve. It would give Space to Thrive the opportunity to provide breakfast and lunch to our public pre-K children, ensuring they are nourished, ready to learn, and supported equitably.

This bill does not replace federal programs—it thoughtfully addresses where federal regulations fall short. It recognizes the reality of mixed-delivery public pre-K and offers a flexible, practical solution that centers children's basic needs.

I urge you to support this bill and help ensure that all public pre-K children—no matter where they learn—have access to the food they need to thrive.

Thank you for your time and consideration.