

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF

L.D. 2064

AN ACT TO EXPAND ACCESS TO EARLY CHILDHOOD NUTRITION BY ESTABLISHING A GRANT PROGRAM FOR PUBLIC PRESCHOOLS

February 5, 2026

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, I am Robbie Feinberg, Director of Communications and Government Relations for Maine School Management Association, testifying on behalf of the legislative committees of the Maine School Boards Association and Maine School Superintendents Association in support of L.D. 2064, An Act to Expand Access to Early Childhood Nutrition by Establishing a Grant Program for Public Preschools.

Maine took an important step when it passed its universal school meals program in 2021, declaring that every public school student is entitled to a no-cost breakfast and lunch every school day. The results are clear: now, Maine students are fed every day because of this program, and educators see the difference in their classrooms. Students who are fed can concentrate on learning rather than worry about when they will have their next meal.

Our associations believe every public school student should receive these no-cost meals, and currently, that is not happening. More than 300 preschoolers are enrolled in public pre-K offered at partner sites, such as private childcare centers or YMCAs. And at these sites, bureaucratic barriers have resulted in meals not getting reimbursed by the National School Lunch Program.

Several districts have seen this inequity up close. One administrator told us that nearly half of her district's pre-K students are denied access to school breakfast and lunch because they are located at partner sites, directly contradicting the spirit of Maine's universal school meals law. This bill would remedy the situation and ensure that all of Maine's public school students receive the nutrition they need to learn and grow.

Beyond getting meals to more Maine children, L.D. 2064 may also help some districts expand public pre-K. In some communities, leaders have shared that the lack of reimbursement for school meals at partner sites has kept them from expanding from half-day to full day pre-K. L.D. 2064 would help to remove this financial barrier and make it easier for districts to make educational decisions in the best interests of their children and families.

While L.D. 2064 does provide a solution to this reimbursement challenge, we do have questions about whether there would be an easier way to handle this issue. Could funding for these students somehow be included in the state's regular reimbursement to districts for school meal costs, instead of needing an entirely separate grant program? We believe that approach could potentially remove administrative hurdles and serve as a more consistent, reliable source of funding moving forward.

Even with these questions, Maine's school leaders believe that L.D. 2064 will feed more students and boost early learning. We urge your committee to support this bill.