

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 Jeanne Reilly, and I am the Director of School Nutrition for RSU #14 in Windham and Raymond, Maine. I write today to express my 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 are recognized for having an exemplary school nutrition program. We strive to provide our students with delicious school breakfast and lunch, prepared with fresh, local ingredients and often cooked from scratch. Thanks to Maine's universal school meals legislation, we are able to provide students from Pre-K through 12th grade with breakfast and lunch at no cost to families, saving families an average of \$165 per month, per child. This legislation has had a positive impact on all students attending school in RSU #14, and we are regularly serving school meals to over 70% of our students.

RSU #14 offers a high-quality, mixed delivery public pre-kindergarten model which 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 can accommodate. We are proud of this collaborative approach, which has proven successful in providing excellent early learning experiences for our youngest students.

However, we face a challenging inequity: children enrolled in our public pre-k program who attend classes at our partner sites do not have access to the same healthy, well-balanced school meals that students in our district buildings receive. This disparity exists because federal regulations prohibit us from providing these students with meals at no cost. Our school nutrition program is well-equipped and ready to deliver 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.

Maine has the highest rate of child food insecurity in New England—1 in 5 children in our state experience food insecurity. Maine's healthy school meals for all legislation has helped to nourish students and diminish the stigma associated with food insecurity, improving the health of children in our communities. Ensuring that all public pre-k students have access to good nutrition will allow our youngest students to focus on learning and growing.

LD 2064 offers a solution by extending these benefits to all children enrolled in public pre-k. 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.

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,

Jeanne Reilly
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