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Maine Association for the Education of Young Children

Testimony of Heather Marden

Co-Executive Director

Maine Association for the Education of Young Children (MaineAEYC)

In Support of LD 258, "An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2023, June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025" (Emergency) (Governor's Bill) Sponsored by Representative Melanie Sachs

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, and the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Monday, February 13, 2023, State House Room 228

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, and Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, members of the Committee on Taxation, I'm Heather Marden, Co-Executive Director of the Maine Association for the Education of Young Children (MaineAEYC). MaineAEYC promotes high-quality early learning for each and every child, birth through age 8, by connecting practice, policy, and research. We advance a diverse, dynamic early childhood profession and support all who care for, educate, and work on behalf of young children.

Initiative: Provides funding to Child Development Services to develop additional preschool programming.

Initiative: Provides funding to align allocation with the existing Infant and Toddlers/Families (Part C) grant.

The budget requests an additional \$10.5 million to fund preschool programming for young children with special education needs through Child Developmental Services. Preschool programming for children identified for special education services is best when it is inclusive and meets the requirements of their least restrictive environment. Supporting expansion of preschool programming for this population of children should consider:

- Programming is taking place in the least restrictive environment for the child and family and is inclusive of settings such as family child care, child care centers, Head Starts and public schools.
- Least restrictive environment should also include continuity of care so that young children are not transitioning multiple times a day or per week

As Maine expands access to publicly funded preschool opportunities for children, it is vital to communities, children and families that we continue to focus on growth in a mixed delivery model. The Department of Education has been awarding Preschool Expansion Grants across Maine to support and encourage partnerships between school districts and licensed child care programs. The public pre-k infrastructure grants recognize the importance of delivering publicly funded pre-k opportunities through a mixed delivery model in Maine that includes family child care, center based child care and Head Start programs. By encouraging partnerships between school districts and existing child care programs who already provide care and education for four year olds across Maine, the partnership model:

- Reduces competition for 4 year olds at the risk of closing valued child care programs for families of children of all ages
- Offers families more opportunities for wrap-around child care services while keeping children in a consistent setting with consistent adults
- Provides stable funding to child care programs
- Creates better continuity of care from child care programs to children transitioning to public schools
- Encourages community collaboration around early childhood initiatives such as shared professional development, peer to peer networking, and shared services
- Provides opportunities for funding support to increase quality of programming

Child care programs such as family child care, Head Starts, and center based programs have had longevity in the state providing care and education for preschool aged children. In fact because of the low margins they operate with, preschool aged children often help pay for the care of infants and toddlers keeping the doors open for many programs. When school districts and child care programs compete for four year olds it can be at the cost of child care programs no longer being able to operate.

With Maine losing around 200 child care programs in the last two years, working families cannot risk losing more. Creating publicly funded pre-k opportunities in child care programs not only supports child care growth through stable funding streams, but also allows children attending child care programs who are eligible for special education services to remain in their least restrictive environments. This model brings services to children into the program they have

become accustomed to and works for the families' child care needs. Most importantly it provides continuity of care, so that young children aren't being bused to multiple places during their days and weeks.

In a 2021 report from Child Developmental Services, those working in child care programs, Head Starts, and private preschool programs accounted for 20.1% of referrals of children ages 3-5 to child developmental services. They came in just below Part C programs/providers who accounted for 22.1% of referrals. These licensed child care settings referred more than physicians and parents. Educators working in these programs get to know the children they are caring for and educating and are a vital part of connecting children and families with necessary services. Our systems must continue to strengthen the inclusion of family child care, Head Start, and centers in these publicly funded opportunities.

There is a bill this session that will ask for continued steps to strengthen Maine's mixed delivery pre-k model through alignment of professional development, training, and certifications for early childhood educators between DHHS and DOE. This bill will also ask for a comprehensive pre-k expansion plan that puts partnerships at the center of growth and incentivises the inclusion of child care while also incentivises school districts to provide full day programming. We ask that you support this legislation as complementary to the investments being proposed in the budget.

Thank you and I'm happy to answer questions that arise.