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Maine Community Action Partnership Supports 1799 An Act to Expand Maine's High-Quality Early Learning and Care for Children by Increasing Public Preschool Opportunities in Communities

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Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, I am Megan Hannan, Executive Director of the Maine Community Action Partnership and the Advocacy Director for the Maine Head Start Directors' Association, and we support 1799 An Act to Expand Maine's High-Quality Early Learning and Care for Children by Increasing Public Preschool Opportunities in Communities

Our state's greatest resource is our people, and our state's policies shape people's possibilities. In Community Action, we create conditions that invite children to learn and adults to apply their skills, tapping into the deep rooted potential in our communities. Through our Whole Family approach, we build a family's capacity for sustained stability and economic growth. We invest in the family's well-being, we let them drive their own story, and we have tangible success.

For our families with young children, we begin our partnership before a child is even born, with Early Head Start home visiting, we continue through Head Start, and in many areas of Maine, we have local public school partners with whom we offer public pre-kindergarten (pre-K). Unfortunately, in many areas, the availability of pre-K partnerships is for only a half day, or even less, meaning children who have been in full day care facilities, whose parents have been able to work full day schedules, are now in a place where they must choose to continue to work full time or try to find a second, appropriate place for their children to continue to learn, play and socialize. This is clearly not an ideal situation.

This bill addresses this issue in a few ways:

- It funds full day pre-K classrooms to allow working families to work full days
- It allows more communities to begin or extend pre-K classrooms, so more families have access to it (today, only 50% of age appropriate children are enrolled in pre-K, and 21% of Maine school districts do not offer any pre-K)
- It supports local partnerships to align local resources, needs and opportunities

All children have the right to the best possible education, close to home and centered on their, their families' and communities' ideals. I must be clear that Head Start partnerships are not the only option, only the one that most of my members are involved in. The opportunity is only limited by the imagination and resolve of the community to make it happen.

Thank you for your time and attention. I also ask for you to read the testimony of my colleague, Sue Powers, who is an expert in early education with many years of experience in the classroom and in promoting and creating pre-K partnerships in Aroostook County and throughout the state.

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