

The Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs  
Testimony from Tracye Fortin, Chief Operating Officer, Educare Central Maine

**In Support Of**

L.D. 1799 “An Act to Expand Maine’s High-quality Early Learning and Care for Children  
by Increasing Public Preschool Opportunities in Communities”

Wednesday, May 10, 2023

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Governance Board*

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Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am Tracye Fortin, Chief Operating Officer for Kennebec Valley Community Action Program Child & Family Services overseeing the development and implementation of Head Start, Early Head Start, Child Care and preschool in multiple public school partnerships, including Educare Central Maine, and community child care centers and family child care homes. I am here in strong support of L.D. 1799

It is with passion and commitment I share with you that in my 33 years of professional experience at KVCAP, high quality, comprehensive, early care and education makes a positive difference in the lives of young children and their families

Since the early 90’s, I have worked to create partnerships between Head Start and Public Schools. What a joy it is to see the evolution of these collaborations with the blending and braiding of funding to sustain high quality preschool programs for all children. There is not a better approach to equity than inclusive programming; mixed incomes, abilities, and cultures. With comprehensive services as the delivery model, every child and their family benefits from developmental and health supports for children as well as resource supports for families. True family partnerships result in family engagement inclusive of both child and family goal setting, a 2-Generation approach. This trajectory of learning continues well into elementary school. Assisting children and families experiencing adverse childhood experiences establishes resiliency skills for lifelong success.

It is cause for celebration that our multiple blended preschool classrooms have evolved to now 24 in 4 school districts across 8 communities, and 9 infant/toddler classrooms with more planned for 2024 and 2025. The partnership possibilities create opportunities for positive change. The Skowhegan district, influenced by the Educare model, is constructing an Early Learning Center in a new school building project. Each of these collaborations have remained solid through several administrative changes, validating the mutual belief in our partnerships. It works!



Additionally we celebrate the success of our Elevate Maine:Somerset model, a proven Early Head Start/Child Care Partnership with 10 community childcare providers, both Family Child Care and Center based, and the impetus for First4ME. This model research indicates quality settings for further public school partnerships

And last but not least, I share with you that the Educare Central Maine Head Start/Child Care/Public school partnership data from the University of Maine Muskie Institute demonstrates that Educare 'graduates' score equal to or better in third grade assessments than their more resourced peers. Sustained learning is testimony for high quality public school / child care / Head Start partnerships for Maine's youngest learners.

Thank you for your attention to the needs of Maine's young children and our state's future workforce

Sincerely,

Tracye Fortin

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