



The Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs  
Testimony from Jason Judd, Executive Director, Educate Maine, & Member,  
ReadyNation

### **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

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I am Jason Judd, Executive Director of Educate Maine, a business-led education advocacy organization. I am here in strong support of L D 1799.

Educate Maine’s mission is to ensure that Maine people are prepared to succeed in education and career and that all Maine people reach their highest educational potential. Investing in robust early education experiences – as LD 1799 provides – is critical for later academic and career success. Educate Maine is also a co-founder of the MaineSpark Coalition, Maine’s state attainment group focused on increasing the number of adults with a degree or credential of value to 60% by 2025 to meet the needs of the economy. We know that investing in high quality early education is needed in order to help adults stay in the workforce and pursue education and workforce training.

Maine has made tremendous progress in expanding public pre-K over the last several decades. Public pre-K has been shown to be a significant help in preparing Maine’s youngest citizens for K-12 education and also building foundational skills that individuals use in the workforce and throughout their lives. Students that have experienced high-quality pre-K prior to Kindergarten are more likely to arrive at school ready to learn, less likely to be held back, and more likely to be proficient in reading and math. Approximately half of Maine’s 4-year-olds are enrolled in pre-K.

We would like to see Maine build on progress to date by expanding pre-K so that it is available to more Maine students and meets the needs of working families. Currently, public pre-K is only required to be 10 hours per week. This bill provides for pre-K to be 30 hours so that it is more aligned with traditional education schedules and could make it possible for parents of young children to work. The current system might unintentionally produce inequities by reaching more children whose parents can afford not to work or who can afford alternative care arrangements around a 10-hour pre-K schedule.

Maine has a range of high-quality pre-K programs in both public schools and private child care facilities. A mixed delivery system builds on the current strengths of Maine's early childhood education. Unfortunately significant geographic disparities exist in public pre-K programs with nearly universal pre-K access in Aroostook and Washington Counties but only 20-30% of 4-year-olds enrolled in public pre-K programs in other counties. This bill would help address this geographic inequity and increase access to various pre-K models across Maine.

The Maine Department of Education's Early Learning Team has done a great job helping grow and expand public pre-K, but they lack the staff to work with more communities to build the partnerships needed to serve more children in a mixed-delivery model. L D 1799 provides consultants experienced in early childhood education to help create partnerships between public schools and licensed child care programs. These consultants will facilitate the creation and implementation of public pre-K expansion in a mixed delivery model so that there are no unintended consequences.

I strongly encourage you to support L D 1799. I'm happy to answer any questions.