



Maine Head Start Directors Association

Mary Lynn Hersey, Vice Chair
Waldo CAP
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In support of

LD 1799 An Act to Expand Maine's High-Quality Early Learning and Care for Children by Increasing Public Preschool Opportunities in Communities. Strengthening opportunities by creating more pre-k.

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs committee, my name is Mary Lynn Hersey and I am a member of the Maine Head Start Director's Association and speaking as a representative on behalf of the Head Start programs within the State.

I am testifying in support of LD 1799 An Act to Expand Maine's High-Quality Early Learning and Care for Children by Increasing Public Preschool Opportunities in Communities.

I am one of several Head Start Directors that has had the pleasure of partnering with school districts within my county to partner in providing high quality, full day pre-k programming in Waldo County. Several other Head Start programs are successfully doing this as well as pre-k expansion has increased over the past decade Presently, 6,238 Maine 4-years olds are enrolled in public pre-k.

We are making progress, but it is now time to strengthen a mixed delivery system to ensure parents are able to access a preschool setting that meets their needs for working families or a child's special consideration. 21% of school districts do not offer public pre-k programming and several are only offering 2.5 hours per day. As you can imagine, this makes it impossible for working families to

participate. Eliminating their children from this opportunity This bill would allow for more opportunities to support local efforts to grow community partnership for public pre-k while promoting full day pre-k options for working families

As an early childhood professional of 30+ years, I see the benefits of the critical foundations set within pre-k programming As a grandmother of three, I now see my adult children struggling with managing decisions around working full-time and choosing the best setting for their children. Of course, they want high-quality education, supporting their child's individual needs, and keeping them with their community and peers. But I had to watch them make a pain staking decision to choose to repeat my oldest grandson's childcare experience, as they could not make the schedule and hours work to enroll him in their local pre-k program and dropping younger siblings at a different location They talk about knowing that he is missing out on somethings within his current location and wished pre-k curriculum could be offered where he is with the extended day for childcare

Expanding the opportunities for full-day early childhood programs to develop and provide training to align with pre-k curriculum and requirements, which will allow for increased opportunities to meet children and family's needs. This will minimize transitions for children, which we know is crucial in the development of young children

On behalf of the Maine Head Start Director's Association we ask for your support in giving parents choice and allowing publicly funded pre-k to be offered in existing child care programs, along with public schools. Allowing for more young learners to enroll and strengthen their foundation for early learning and later in life.

Thank you for your time.