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Maine Association for the
Education of Young Children

Testimony of Heather Marden

On behalf of the Maine Association for the Education of Young Children

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**

5/10/23

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is 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.

I would like to start off by inviting us all to have a shared understanding of pre-k, preschool, and public pre-K as they often get used interchangeably but can imply very different things. Preschool is often used to describe children between the ages of 2-4 years old. Pre-K is often used to speak of the programming a child participates in the year before they enter kindergarten. Public pre-K typically means the programming of which a child participates in the year prior to kindergarten is publicly funded. None of these terms describe a setting, just the ages and stages of children involved.

Most child care programs in Maine including our center, family child care, and Head Starts have and do serve preschool children in their programs and typically provide pre-k education for 4-year-olds prior to their entry into kindergarten getting them prepared for that next step. What has not been tradition in these programs is that they have not been publicly funded for the work they do in these early years outside of participation in Head Start funding and/or the Child Care Subsidy Program.

Efforts have been made to expand publicly funded pre-K access for 4-year-olds across Maine including investments in Pre-K Expansion grants funded through the American Rescue Plan. These grants encouraged partnership between public schools and their community child care programs which have resulted in some increases in child care programs participation in Maine's mixed delivery early childhood education system.

A mixed delivery system is one in which public preschool and child care are offered through a variety of settings, including school districts and community settings, such as Head Start agencies, community-based child care centers, private schools, and family child care homes

A mixed delivery system has many benefits, including adding valuable capacity to serve children, providing families with settings that meet their working needs, and supporting small child care businesses. A mixed delivery system can have a lot of challenges too. These challenges include navigating partnerships, blending and braiding funding from different state and federal programs, and avoiding unintended consequences of competition for children.

In Maine's current mixed delivery model, child care programs can participate as publicly funded pre-k programs if they meet Chapter 124 guidelines under the MDOE and if their local school district chooses to partner with them.

An unintended consequence of this can happen when a school district does not want to partner or is not ready to partner with a child care program. The child care program then has no other option to become a publicly funded pre-k program. Working families may also need their 4-year-old to be in an early childhood setting closer to their workplace and outside of their school district. Solely tying funding to come through school districts can leave working families without flexible options for programming.

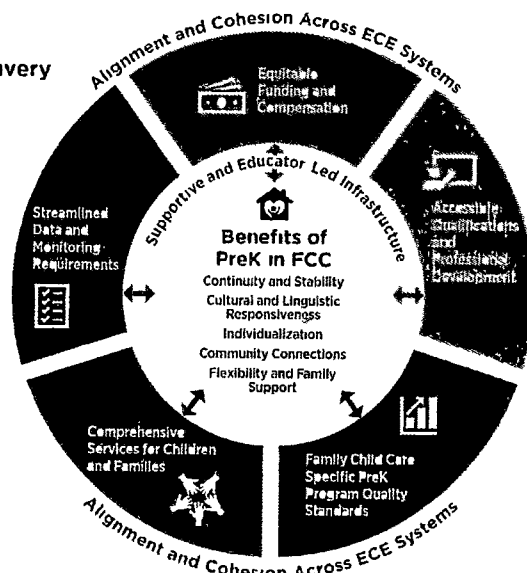
LD 1799 would support a work group to study and make recommendations for more equitable opportunities for child care centers, family child care, and Head Starts to be included in the public pre-K system.

One of these areas of study would include how to reduce barriers of meeting educator qualifications for publicly funded pre-K programs. Currently a lead teacher must have an 081 certification which means a bachelor's degree in early childhood education from a college that meets the requirements. The challenge is that many teachers in child care earn their credentials through our Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development network. These credentials are high quality and prepare educators with the knowledge and skills needed to support the care and education of their students. However, these credentials do not count towards certifications allowing educators to provide publicly funded pre-K curriculum. The work group would be tasked on how to better align professional development, credentials, and certifications across DHHS and DOE to bring early childhood to a more cohesive, inclusive place for educators regardless of the setting they are teaching in. They would also look at how to promote better articulation agreements across higher education, CTE's and training programs for the field creating multiple pathways for educators.

Family child care often faces many more barriers to be included in Maine's mixed delivery system. Stigma about care and education provided from the home has hindered the inclusion of family child care in our publicly funded pre-K systems. Currently Maine has no publicly funded pre-K partnerships with family child care providers. We hope to change that and it's important particularly in our areas where family child care is the backbone of our communities. Maine's

Conceptual Framework for Including FCC in Mixed-Delivery PreK Systems

Implementation Areas



family child care providers often work 50-60 hours per week, have many years of experience and training hours, yet have less opportunity to lend time to receiving higher education certification. Looking at how to include family child care more equitably such as through meeting national accreditation standards versus holding an 081

certification can provide better opportunities for this vital sector that brings a wealth of knowledge to early education systems

There is a national effort called PreK in Family Child Care Project. Efforts in this project outline the barriers in our systems for family child care and provide great policy recommendations to lean into these great providers' quality programming

I want to lean into the benefits of child care programs and Head Starts programs being able to offer publicly funded pre-K programming for 4-year olds

- Can offer full day programming including before and after school which supports the schedules of working families
- They have historically already been providing developmentally appropriate education for 4-year-olds
- They provide continuity of care as many programs have children enrolled as infants who can grow with their program where they are comfortable and have established trust
- Parents can choose the program that meets their needs for getting to/from work, meets the child's needs such as mixed ages or smaller settings, or has siblings in the same place
- Provides stable funding for our vital child care programs that run on thin margins
- Doesn't pull 4-year-olds from their child care program which can hurt child care businesses and disrupt services for children of other ages

An important part of this bill establishes a Commission to study governance and funding in early care and early childhood education. Maine has made great strides in better coordinating programming for children with the establishment of the Maine Children's Cabinet and their

Advisory Council A Commission would continue to examine how we further strengthen the coordination of early childhood programming, funding, and resources. Especially keeping at the forefront the accessibility and understanding of these systems to those operating in them daily including families, children, early childhood education settings, support service providers, etc

The goal of strengthening early care and education governance is to make it easier for those on the ground to operate in these systems

I hope you support LD 1799 and help Maine grow and strengthen its mixed delivery system of early care and education