



STATE OF MAINE
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Senator Rafferty, Senate Chair
Representative Brennan, House Chair
Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and Distinguished Members of the Educational and Cultural Affairs Committees

LD 1799, An Act to Expand Maine's High-quality Early Learning and Care for Children by Increasing Public Preschool Opportunities in Communities, would create two working stakeholder groups staffed by the Department of Education (DOE) focused on expansion of public pre-k and a commission to study and make recommendations on early care and childhood education governance and funding. The bill would also require annual reporting from the DOE.

There have been a number of bills (previously and in the current session) seeking to expand public pre-k through a mixed delivery model, and to study or organize the governance of early care and education, from birth through age 5. The work proposed in this bill related to public pre-k expansion is in alignment with efforts the DOE has been supporting. The Department's work has focused on increasing the number of 4-year-olds served through additions of classrooms, partnerships with community providers, and expansion of programming hours from part time to full day/full week programming through the Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan Pre-K Expansion Grants (see data below). Additionally, Rule Chapter 124 *Basic Approval Standards Public Preschool Programs*, already allows for school administrative unit partnerships with licensed community providers such as Child Care, Head Start, YMCAs, and others.

Public Pre-K Data for 2022-23

- 6,238 4-year-olds enrolled in public pre-k (approximately 52% based on Kindergarten enrollments)
- 164 out of the approximately 190 Maine SAUs that offer Kindergarten also offer public pre-k, although many are not offering enough spaces to be considered universal
- Approximately 42% of school administrative units (SAUs) offer full day/full week public pre-k
- Approximately 24% of SAUs offer public pre-k in partnership with a community provider (e.g., Head Start, licensed child care, etc.)
- In the 2022-23 school year, 8 SAUs added public pre-k and 13 SAUs expanded public pre-k programming. For school year 2023-24, it is anticipated that 6 more SAUs will add public pre-k and 18 will expand.

Further, the Preschool Development B-5 Renewal Grant (PDG) recently awarded to Maine's Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) in partnership with Maine DOE includes a number of strategies suggested by the bill which are scheduled to unfold through 2025. These strategies include:

- 1 Formation of a working stakeholder group to study expansion of public preschool, particularly through the use of partnerships with community providers, and to assist with the design of a 2-year pilot to test public pre-k partnership strategies in the mixed-delivery system Findings from the study and the pilot will inform recommendations for how to support public pre-k delivery and funding through a mixed delivery system moving forward
- 2 Hiring a pre-k partnership specialist in the Maine DOE to support mixed-delivery preschool programming through provision of ongoing technical assistance
- 3 Development and pilot of a Kindergarten Entry Inventory
- 4 Focus on articulation agreements and pathways for early care and education credentialing

The DOE works collaboratively with the Office of Child and Family Services (OCFS) and other divisions within DHHS that have purview over early care and learning Additionally, the Maine Children's Cabinet also provides a structure for ensuring information sharing and ongoing collaboration across agencies The recently awarded PDG is a great example of that collaboration It is important to ensure that any legislation about pre-school expansion coordinates with the current work of the DOE and OCFS

It is unclear what the vision is for how the proposed Commission would coordinate with the other working groups or stakeholder groups outlined in LD 1799 Introducing a new element to the governance structure may have the unintended consequence of setting back some of this work so that new members may become acquainted with the content area and existing projects With work in progress, or planned, on many of the activities outlined in the proposed bill, it would be helpful to provide time to implement the strategies in the PDG (infrastructure grant) before implementing additional stakeholder groups and studying new governance structures We are also open to comparing the makeup of the PDG workgroups with the makeup of the workgroups outlined in the bill to ensure stakeholder alignment

The Department will be available to provide additional information on LD 1799 and respond to any questions during the upcoming work session

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by
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