

131st Legislature
Senate of
Maine
Senate District 24

Senator Eloise Vitelli
Senate Majority Leader
3 State House Station
Augusta, ME 04333-0003
Office (207) 287-1515

Testimony of Senator Eloise Vitelli presenting
**LD 1799, An Act to Expand Maine’s High-quality Early Learning and Care
for Children by Increasing Public Preschool Opportunities in Communities**
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs
May 10, 2023

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and fellow members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Eloise Vitelli, and I represent Senate District 24, which includes all of Sagadahoc County and the Town of Dresden in Lincoln County. I am before you today to introduce LD 1799, “An Act to Expand Maine’s High-quality Early Learning and Care for Children by Increasing Public Preschool Opportunities in Communities.”

We all want to be able to educate our youngest children and give them the strongest possible start. I have been working hard, alongside child care providers, early educators, and experts in the field, on a bill to put Maine’s pre-K on a path to long-term growth and stability.

My bill would establish a timeline, an implementation plan and incentives to expand publicly funded preschool programming to 30 hours per week or the length of the local school day at a school administrative unit with the goal of establishing an equitable, mixed delivery public preschool system that provides universal access for preschool-aged children and their families.

The bill will help all of Maine model what we’ve already seen succeed in my district, where Bath and Brunswick offer high quality preschool in multiple places: in our public schools, in our YMCA and Headstart programs, and in our private child care facilities. Under this model, we deliver families access to pre-K wherever it is most convenient to them! The family decides where is best for their child to learn — maybe it’s because an older sibling already attends that local elementary school, maybe it’s because the YMCA is two blocks away, maybe it’s because the beloved local child care provider is already part of the family’s routine.

My bill would expand this mixed-delivery model of pre-K education throughout Maine. Maine parents would have more full-day pre-K options, something working families need.

Maine has made steady progress on public pre-K expansion over the past decade, reaching 50% enrollment for the first time ever. Now it’s time to strengthen a mixed delivery system which ensures parent choice, expands pre-K to a full school day to better match the needs of working parents, and aligns professional development and career pathways for all early educators.

Today, 6,269 four-year-olds in Maine attend public preschool. 79% of Maine school districts offer public preschool now, and Maine DOE believes 85% will by 2024. My bill is about closing this gap and leaving no family behind. My bill will push for actionable timelines and goals so Maine can reach 100%. A commission will tie in the work being done with federal preschool development funds that Maine DOE is working on, and bring the community child care providers to the table so that by March 2024 we have a clear path to 30-hour week preschool options in every part of our state.

Maine law already allows for school administrative unit partnerships with community providers such as Child Care, Head Start, YMCA, and others. However, only 24% of school administrative units offer public pre-k in partnership with a community provider.

Right now, 164 of the 190 Maine school administrative units offer public pre-k, but many are not offering enough spaces to be considered universal. Only 42% of school administrative units offer full day/full week public pre-K options now.

When quality pre-K is available to children, they are more likely to arrive at kindergarten ready to learn, with fewer behavioral challenges.

Maine families are asking for access to affordable, high quality child care in every corner of the state. In order to make Maine's program sustainable, we must give all Maine children with working parents an opportunity to access high quality early education and ensure our kids are prepared for Kindergarten. This bill adds accountability and a timeline to the path to universal pre-K.

I am happy to answer any questions you may have.



Eloise Vitelli

Senate Majority Leader, Senate District 24
Sagadahoc County and Dresden