



maineaeYC

Maine Association for the
Education of Young Children

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of the Maine Association for the Education of Young Children (MaineAEYC)

In Support of LD 1389 - An Act to Create the Building Opportunity Through Out-of-School Time Program

4/8/2025

Senator Ingwersen, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Health and Human Services,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of LD 1389, An Act to Create the Building Opportunity Through Out-of-School Time Program. The Maine Association for the Education of Young Children (MaineAEYC) is a statewide organization dedicated to promoting high-quality early childhood education and care for children from birth through age eight. We believe strongly that access to quality out-of-school time (OST) programming is critical for the development and well-being of all children and youth in Maine. LD 1389 provides a vital step forward in addressing the significant need for increased access to such programs.

Out-of-school time programming, including before-school, after-school, and summer programs, is an essential resource for Maine's children and families. These programs not only offer safe and enriching environments for children when school is not in session but also contribute significantly to the social, emotional, and academic development of youth. However, many communities across Maine face substantial barriers in accessing quality out-of-school time programs. These barriers include geographic isolation, financial constraints, and a lack of available programming, particularly in rural and underserved areas.

The **Building Opportunity Through Out-of-School Time Program** proposed in LD 1389 addresses these critical gaps by creating a competitive grant program that will increase the availability and quality of out-of-school time programming for Maine's school-age children. By supporting nonprofit organizations, libraries, and other community-based entities, this

initiative will help create new opportunities for youth while enhancing and expanding existing programs.

According to the **Afterschool Alliance's "America After 3PM"** report, **over 60% of Maine children** do not have access to afterschool programs, particularly in rural and economically disadvantaged areas (Afterschool Alliance, 2019). The report also highlights that **nearly 30,000** children in Maine alone are unsupervised after school, with a significant proportion of these children coming from low-income households (Afterschool Alliance, 2019). The lack of structured, safe, and enriching afterschool care creates an increased risk for children in terms of academic decline, engagement in risky behaviors, and social isolation.

In addition, a study by the **Maine Department of Education** identified that families in both urban and rural regions struggle to find affordable and accessible programs that meet their children's needs, exacerbating disparities in OST access (Maine Department of Education, 2020). Many working parents, especially in rural areas, are unable to find affordable and convenient afterschool care, leaving their children without supervision during critical hours of the day.

LD 1389 provides a comprehensive solution to these challenges by:

- **Increasing Access:** By funding community-based nonprofit organizations, libraries, and other groups, this program will directly address the lack of programs in many areas, particularly those in rural communities.
- **Improving Quality:** The grants will allow existing programs to enhance their offerings, providing professional development for staff and increasing the quality of programming.
- **Creating Equity:** The program aims to reduce barriers to access by prioritizing funding for organizations serving children from low-income families or rural areas, ensuring that all children, regardless of background, have access to enriching opportunities.
- **Encouraging Collaboration:** The program also encourages collaboration between local government agencies, schools, and community organizations, fostering a more integrated approach to supporting children and families.

The appropriation of **\$5,000,000** from the General Fund for the 2026-27 fiscal year is an important investment in the future of Maine's children and youth. This funding will not only help expand access to critical out-of-school time programs but also have a positive impact on workforce development, public safety, and long-term economic prosperity. Studies

have shown that children who participate in high-quality OST programs have improved academic outcomes, better social skills, and are less likely to engage in risky behaviors. Moreover, these programs contribute to the local economy by providing jobs for youth development professionals and educators (Afterschool Alliance, 2019).

We also appreciate that LD 1389 includes provisions for monitoring grantee performance and requiring annual reporting to the Legislature. This ensures transparency and accountability, allowing the program's effectiveness to be assessed and improved over time.

MaineAEYC strongly supports LD 1389 and urges this committee to move forward with the creation of the Building Opportunity Through Out-of-School Time Program. Expanding access to high-quality out-of-school time programs is a critical step toward ensuring that all Maine children, regardless of their background or geographic location, have the opportunity to succeed and thrive. This investment in our children will pay dividends in the form of a more educated, engaged, and productive future workforce.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important bill. We look forward to working with you to ensure that all Maine children have the opportunities they need to reach their full potential.

Thank you for your time.