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President of the Senate

THE MAINE SENATE
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**Testimony of Senate President Mattie Daughtry in support of
LD 1689, “An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Study Expansion
of Public Preschool and Early Care and Education”
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs**

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Esteemed Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Mattie Daughtry. I serve as President of the Maine Senate and proudly represent Senate District 23, including Brunswick, Freeport, Harpswell, Pownal, Chebeague Island, and part of Yarmouth.

I am proud to cosponsor LD 1689, An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Study Expansion of Public Preschool and Early Care and Education, and I strongly urge the committee to support it.

Last year, the Legislature created a bipartisan Commission to chart a course toward universal preschool access by the 2026–2027 school year. Over the course of many meetings, the Commission heard from educators, parents, school leaders, child care providers, and policy experts across Maine. We learned two things very clearly: First, high-quality preschool makes a profound, lasting difference in the lives of Maine children and their families. Second, while the State has made great progress, real barriers remain that prevent too many families from accessing early learning opportunities.

LD 1689 addresses those barriers head-on. It ensures that every new elementary school built after this fall will include space for preschool or child care. It modernizes our funding model to encourage full-day preschool, aligning it more closely with kindergarten funding to give school districts and parents the support they need. It also directs the Departments of Education and Health and Human Services to work together to reduce credentialing and regulatory barriers — so that qualified early educators can get into classrooms more easily or, like we’ve done in Bath and Brunswick, public pre-K students can be taught in private child care centers, while maintaining the high standards that Maine’s youngest learners deserve.

Crucially, LD 1689 also provides immediate, tangible help. The bill establishes regional coordinators to support school districts and community partners in creating or expanding programs, and it invests \$4 million in preschool expansion grants over the next two years. These investments are vital to translating a policy dream into reality on the ground.

At its heart, LD 1689 is about opportunity: the opportunity for every Maine child to start school ready to learn and thrive, regardless of where they live. It’s about supporting working families, strengthening our communities, and building the future workforce Maine needs to prosper.

The bipartisan Commission's work was unanimous. The need is urgent. And the tools we need to act are right here in this bill. I respectfully urge you to vote "ought to pass" on LD 1689.

Thank you for your time and for your commitment to Maine's children and families.

President of the Senate, Senate District 23

Brunswick, Freeport, Harpswell, Pownal, Chebeague Island, and part of Yarmouth