

May 1, 2025

**Testimony in Favor of the Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Study Expansion of Public Preschool and Early Care and Education**

Dear Members of the Committee,

My name is Nicole Chaplin, I am the Early Childhood Director at Kennebec Valley Community Action Program in Skowhegan. In my role, I oversee the implementation of Preschool Partnerships across Somerset County, in collaboration with Head Start, The Maine Department of Education, public schools, and community childcare providers. KVCAP has decades of experience with mixed delivery systems that reflect a community model of comprehensive high-quality programming.

I am here today to express my strong support for LD 1689 which is aimed at expanding public preschool and early care and education in our state. This legislation is not just a positive step towards improving educational opportunities for our youngest learners; it is an essential investment in the future of our children, families, and, by extension, our communities.

As we know, early childhood education plays a crucial role in child development. Research has shown that high-quality preschool programs lead to better academic achievements, improved social skills, and enhanced emotional well-being in children. By requiring that public elementary schools include areas for preschool, we are ensuring that these opportunities are accessible to all families, regardless of socio-economic status. This change will support the elimination of barriers that many families face when trying to access quality early childhood education.

Revising the funding formula for essential programs and services to mirror the method used for funding kindergarten instruction will incentivize school districts to implement full-day preschool programs. This is a vital step in aligning Early Childhood Education with the educational framework that our children and families will encounter throughout their academic journeys. Additionally, full-day programs support parents by allowing them to enter and remain in the workforce without the concern of finding care for their child.

I also commend the proposed studies on early childhood educator credentials and standards. Identifying barriers to expanding preschool programs and suggesting improvements will be vital in empowering our educators and providers to deliver high-quality education. However, it is important to ensure that staff are highly qualified for the specialty area of Early Childhood Education. Educators are the backbone of the education system, and equipping them with specialized Early Childhood Education and experience with flexibility and support will ultimately benefit the children they serve.

The funding allocated for preschool expansion grants and the establishment of regional coordinators to support schools encourages collaboration and innovation across our state. These coordinators play a crucial role in supporting schools to understand the resources and partnerships available to them and how to implement successful preschool programs in collaboration with their communities. A successful example of this approach is the Margaret

Chase Smith Community School, which is set to open in Skowhegan this coming fall. This school will serve children from 6 weeks to 5th grade and is the first of its kind in the State of Maine. The Margaret Chase Smith Community School will serve as a model for comprehensive, high-quality, community-centered programming that embraces mixed delivery systems, blended funding sources, collaboration, and innovation.

In conclusion, I urge this committee to support LD 1689 while remaining vigilant to ensure high-quality specialized programs that encourage collaboration and mixed delivery systems. It lays the foundation for a progressive approach to early childhood education that prioritizes the needs of our children, families, and communities. Together, we can enhance educational opportunities and give every child a strong start.

Thank you for your time today, and I look forward to seeing the positive impact this legislation will have on our state.

Nicole Chaplin, Early Childhood Director

Kennebec Valley Community Action Program/Educare Central Maine

[nicolec@kvcap.org](mailto:nicolec@kvcap.org)