



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Testimony of Rep. Tavis Hasenfus introducing
**LD 1689, An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to
Study Expansion of Public Preschool and Early Care and Education**
Before the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee

Good morning, Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy and esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. My name is Tavis Hasenfus, and I represent House District 57, which is the communities of Readfield and Winthrop. I am here before you today to introduce **LD 1689, An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Study Expansion of Public Preschool and Early Care and Education.**

"It is easier to build strong children than to fix broken men." This quote, often attributed to Frederick Douglass, holds a special resonance for me. I strongly believe that shaping the minds of tomorrow starts today, and the earlier we can begin building our men and women, the better our future will be. The science is clear: learning starts early, and the earlier we can educate our kids, the more successful they will be.

As House Chair of the Commission to Study The Expansion of Public Preschool and Early Care Education, I was struck by how much we all believe early education needs to be a state priority. It was not partisan; we all accepted the basic premise that quality universal pre-K education should be a priority of the Maine Legislature.

I stand before you today to advocate for a crucial investment in our future: universal, full-day pre-kindergarten programming where every child has the opportunity to thrive, to learn and to reach their full potential, regardless of their zip code, background or their family's income.

Maine is currently offering pre-K in 80% of our districts and serving 50% of our eligible students. Speaking from experience, having had one child complete pre-K, one currently attending and one more on deck, I can attest to the exceptional education Maine pre-K teachers provide. But we can do better. And we must do better.

Right now, pre-K is too hard for working families. Working families struggle to take advantage of some of the current opportunities offered, as they cannot leave work midday to pick up or drop off their child to or from pre-K. Childcare opportunities are few and far between, forcing them into either leaving their work so they can make the daily transition or withholding their child from pre-K because they cannot afford to leave the workforce. I know in my district, many families face this predicament and some refrain from partaking in the current public pre-K offerings.

I am lucky. I have my Grammy Wini. She is a lifesaver and makes it possible for me to be here. As we speak, she is in the process of picking up Griffin from pre-K in Readfield and then on to pick up Grafton half an hour later at nursery school in Winthrop. But not everyone has a Grammy Wini, and we cannot expect only well-resourced families to have access to early childhood education.

For too long, access to high-quality, early childhood education in Maine has been a patchwork, a privilege rather than a right. While some families can afford and access enriching pre-K programs, many others, particularly those in rural communities or with limited financial resources, are left behind. This disparity creates an uneven playing field before our children even enter kindergarten, setting some up for success while others start at a significant disadvantage.

That is why this commission was so necessary and why my bill to implement its recommendations and expand pre-K in Maine to provide full-day universal programming to every area of the state is of crucial importance!

Universal, mixed delivery of full day pre-K is not just feel-good policy; it is a smart investment with profound and long-lasting benefits for our children, our families and our entire state.

The benefits of universal pre-K are well-documented and far-reaching. High-quality early childhood education enhances cognitive abilities, social skills and emotional well-being. Children who attend pre-K are better prepared for the academic challenges ahead, exhibit improved behavior and are more likely to graduate high school and pursue higher education. These advantages translate into a more skilled workforce, reduced social service costs and a stronger economy for Maine.

For our children, the advantages are undeniable:

- **Stronger Foundations for Learning:** Research consistently shows that children who attend high-quality pre-K enter kindergarten better prepared academically, socially and emotionally. They have stronger literacy and numeracy skills, better attention spans and are more likely to be engaged and successful learners throughout their school years.
- **Closing the Achievement Gap:** Universal pre-K is a powerful tool for equity. By providing early learning opportunities to all children, we can begin to close the

achievement gap that often emerges before kindergarten, giving every child a fairer start in life.

- **Developing Essential Social-Emotional Skills:** Pre-K fosters crucial social and emotional development. Children learn how to interact with their peers, share, take turns, manage their emotions and develop problem-solving skills – all essential for success in school and in life.
- **Increased Graduation Rates and Future Success:** Studies have linked participation in high-quality early childhood education to higher high school graduation rates, increased earning potential and reduced involvement in the criminal justice system later in life.

The benefits extend far beyond the individual child:

- **Supporting Working Families:** Universal pre-K provides affordable and reliable childcare options for Maine families, allowing parents to participate more fully in the workforce, boosting our economy and reducing financial strain on households.
- **Strengthening Our Communities:** Investing in our youngest learners strengthens our communities as a whole. A well-educated populace is more engaged, more productive and more likely to contribute to the overall well-being of our state.
- **A Stronger Maine Economy:** By preparing our children for future success, we are building a stronger and more competitive Maine economy for tomorrow. Investing in early childhood education is an investment in our future workforce.

Some may raise concerns about the cost of implementing universal pre-K. However, we must consider the far greater cost of inaction. The cost of remedial education, the cost of lost productivity, the cost of social services needed to support individuals who did not receive a strong early foundation – these costs far outweigh the investment in universal pre-K. This is not an expense; it is an investment with significant long-term returns.

Additionally, I have introduced a separate bill, **LD 191**, that can potentially raise 30-45 million annually and which the state can use to pay for the expansion of pre-K expansion and childcare. This bill is currently in the Taxation Committee, and I expect it to receive bipartisan support and no opposition from the administration.

Maine has a proud tradition of valuing education. Now is the time to extend that commitment to our youngest learners. By implementing universal pre-kindergarten, we can ensure that every child in Maine has the opportunity to reach their full potential. We can build a stronger, more equitable and more prosperous future for our state.

The call for universal pre-K is not just about education; it's about equity and opportunity. By providing all children, regardless of their socioeconomic background, with access to quality early learning, we lay the groundwork for a more just and prosperous society. This initiative will

support working families, reduce disparities in educational outcomes and contribute to the overall well-being of our communities.

Let us work together as parents, educators, community leaders and policymakers to make universal pre-K a reality in Maine. Let us invest in our children, invest in our future and build the Maine we all know is possible.

Thank you.

Pre-K Bill Amendment Recommendations:

An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Study Expansion of Public Preschool and Early Care and Education

Amendment suggestion:

An Act to Implement the Recommendations of the Commission to Study Expansion of Public Preschool and Early Care and Education to Strengthen Maine's Mixed Delivery Model and Inclusion of Various Early Childhood Settings

Reason: Publicly funded pre-k and early childhood services will and need to look different based on community availability and needs. Emphasizing mixed delivery shows the design to be inclusive of various settings that can meet the necessary standards of quality and not a "one size fits all" approach.

§4273. Elementary schools to include area for preschool or child care

A public elementary school constructed after October 1, 2025 ~~must~~ include an area that may be used for preschool instruction or child care.

Amendment suggestion:

Notwithstanding any other provision of law, a facility constructed, renovated, or expanded under this Act may include dedicated space that meets all applicable health, safety, and programmatic standards for the provision of early care and education services to children from birth through five years of age.

State-allocated funds may be used to support the design, construction, renovation, or expansion of such space, provided that it is intended to reduce gaps in access and to high-quality early childhood education and care. The inclusion of early childhood education facilities shall be considered an allowable and prioritized use of capital funding under this Act.

Reasoning: As school districts work with local community to establish publicly funded pre-k needs and gaps in child care services where the school district could be a partner, it should be allowed through state funded school construction that costs can go towards supporting these builds and retrofits for this aged population. The goal would be that the school work with the community and child care providers to understand gaps and needs and not compete with existing child care programs to fill spots.

Section 2

Amendment suggestion:

Paragraph should also make clear that the funding formula for funding Pre-K should do the following::

1 funding the SAU for pre-K should fund a full day program more than the half day program. The current formula funds ½ day at the same rate as full day.

. 2 the funding needs to be portable and be able to follow the child and not necessarily be limited to funding the district in which the child resides. attending pre-K in the school district the pupil resides may not be right for every family or every community. some children may want to go in the same community as a siblings childcare a parent's work or perhaps remain in the child care facility the four year old was in previously. As noted in the report this is comparable to what is done in Colorado.

Sec. 3. Department of Education to study early childhood education credentialing procedures and policies. The Department of Education shall study early childhood educator and provider credentialing procedures and policies as they relate to nursery school teachers, preschool teachers, kindergarten teachers and elementary school teachers. The department shall identify barriers to the expansion of preschool programs in this State and recommend improvements to early childhood educator and provider credentialing procedures and policies that would provide greater flexibility in credentialing and facilitate the expansion of preschool programs by school administrative units.

Amendment suggestion:

The Department of Education and the Department of Health and Human Services shall jointly develop and implement a unified framework for credentialing early childhood educators serving children from birth through five years of age. This collaboration shall include the identification and elimination of redundant or duplicative training and certification requirements currently administered separately by each Department.

The Departments shall, by rule, establish a single, aligned certification system that includes multiple, accessible pathways to credentialing. These pathways shall be integrated through both the Department of Education's certification processes and the Maine Roads to Quality Professional Development Network Career Lattice.

The unified certification developed under this section shall qualify an individual to work across both public and private early childhood education settings in the State of Maine, ensuring consistency, workforce mobility, and equitable recognition of qualifications across sectors in order to grow Maine's mixed delivery system of early care and education.

Reason: The Departments have been holding working groups on this for two years through the Preschool Development grant and it is time to implement action from what they have been convening on with folks from the workforce.

Sec. 4. Department of Health and Human Services to study standards and rules for early childhood educators and providers. The Department of Health and Human Services, in collaboration with the Department of Education and stakeholders, shall study the standards and rules for early childhood educators and providers in order to better align standards and rules across all early childhood educators and providers and reduce barriers to the expansion of preschool programs and the provision of early childhood education services.

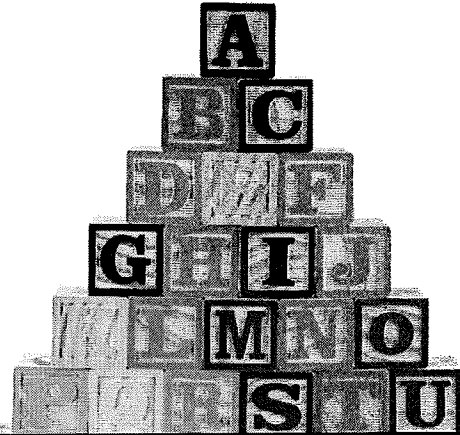
Amendment suggestion:

The Department of Health and Human Services, in collaboration with the Department of Education and in consultation with relevant stakeholders, shall conduct a comprehensive review and alignment of all applicable standards, rules, and regulations governing early childhood education settings, including but not limited to public preschool programs, private childcare providers, and Head Start programs.

The purpose of this review shall be to identify and eliminate conflicting, duplicative, or burdensome requirements that create barriers to the expansion of mixed delivery, high-quality preschool and early childhood education services across the State.

Reason: Focusing on the whole systems rules and requirements versus the providers will reduce overall reductions in barriers.

The Path to Public Pre-K in Maine



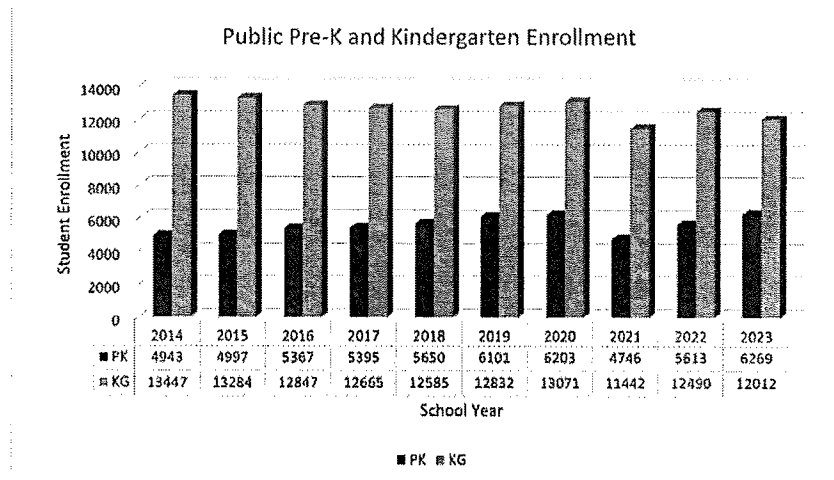
➤ **LD 1799 - 131st Legislature**

**Created the Commission to
study expansion of Public Pre-
school and Early Care and
Education**

**Set Goals: Universal access to
public pre-K 100% by 2026-27**

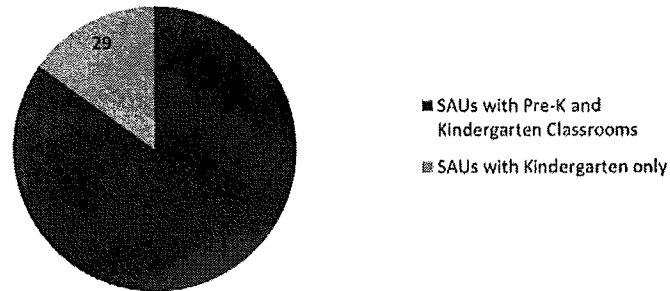
Lay of the Land

- The Department of Education estimates that 52% of 4-year-olds in Maine are enrolled in pre-K. That's roughly 6,269 students.
- To reach universal pre-K, Maine needs to act creatively, through mixed-delivery systems that employ public and private providers, to offer early childhood education to the rest of Maine's 4-year-olds.



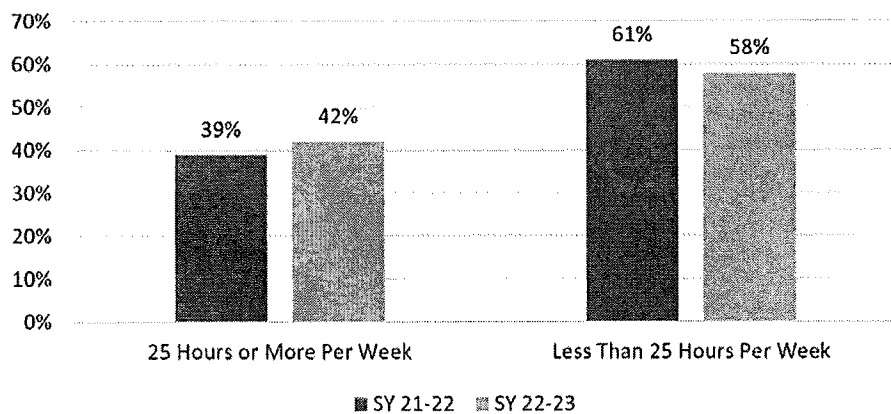
Over the last ten years, there has been a steady increase in public Pre-K enrollment. Currently, public schools in Maine serve approximately 52% of 4-year-olds in public Pre-K. This is calculated by dividing the Pre-K enrollment by the kindergarten enrollment.

Number of School Administrative Units (SAUs) With Pre-K and/or Kindergarten Programs



As of the current school year (2023-2024), approximately 85% of SAUs offer a public Pre-K option for their communities. Of those 164 SAUs, 51% report universal enrollment in Pre-K.

School Administrative Units (SAUs) Weekly Operating Schedule



Why Public Pre-K Partnerships?

- Child care and Pre-K are interconnected
- Children and parents need consistent, convenient, and quality care
- School districts benefit from added community capacity to serve 3 and 4-year-olds
- Employers benefit from expanded child care options for employees
- Communities benefit from stronger families, interconnected providers that leverage diverse, local resources
- Models of collaborative partnerships exist and are proving effective in supporting the necessary child care provider network while providing opportunities for full-day Pre-K

Commission To Study Expansion of Public Preschool and Early Care and Education

EXPERT

Christine Frost-Bertinet, representing the public school system
Melissa Harding and Joe Whitmore, parents of children under 5 years of age who have used state services for their children
Chrissie Davis, representing family child care services
Sue Powers, representing Head Start programs
Jordyn Rossignol, representing center-based child care services
Carla Kelly, representing public preschool teachers
Lee Anne Larsen and Dr. Todd Landry, representing the DOE and DHHS for their involvement in the provision of services for children and families of children under 5
Heather Manchester, an expert in school funding
Erin Frazier, representing Child Development Services System

BIPARTISAN LEGISLATOR

Senator Eloise Vitelli, Chair
Senator Jim Libby
Representative Tavis Hasenfus, Chair
Representative Amanda Collamore

Key Points Recommendation #1

**Provide incentives and increase funding –
both for ongoing costs and start-up costs –
for public preschool programs.**

**In 2022, Maine DOE received \$10 million through the Jobs and
Recovery Plan for the Pre-K Expansion Grant Program**

MJRP Pre-K Expansion Grants

Round	# of SAUs	# in Partnership	Amount of Funding
1	10	2	\$2,422,743.89
2	15	7	\$4,778,514.07
3	4	1	\$928,080.45
4	3	1	\$840,000.00
Totals	29	10	\$8,969,338.41

30 out of 32 SAUs offering full day/full week programming through expansions.



131st Supplemental Budget Initiatives Related to Pre-K Education

Agency	Account	Initiative		
Education, Department of	PRESCHOOL SPECIAL EDUCATION Z399	Provides funding to establish the Preschool Special Education program supporting special education and related services for preschool children ages 3-5	\$10,000, 000	\$10,000,0 00
Municipal Bond Bank, Maine	School Revolving Renovation Fund	PART CCC requires the State Controller to transfer \$4 million from the unappropriated surplus of the General Fund to the School Revolving Renovation Fund at the Maine Municipal Bond Bank to support the renovation needs of school administrative units that have voluntarily assumed the free, appropriate public education for children aged 3 through 5	\$4,000,0 00	\$4,000,00 0

Key Points Recommendation #2

**Increase flexibility in early childhood
education credentialing.**

Summary of Current Endorsements

The State Board of Education Rule Chapter 115, Part II: Requirements for Specific Certificates and Endorsements governs early education teacher credentials. As required under the Maine DOE rule chapter 124, public preschool teachers must hold the Endorsement 081: Early Childhood Teacher, which allows the certificate holder to teach students birth through kindergarten (also referred to as the Maine DOE Early Childhood 081 (B-5) endorsement).

The other elementary endorsements available for early childhood educators in the State include:

- Endorsement 029: Early Elementary Teacher, which allows the certificate holder to teach students pre-kindergarten through grade 3 (Prek-3);
- Endorsement 020: Elementary Teacher, which allows the certificate holder to teach students kindergarten through grade 6 (K-6); and
- Endorsement 282: Teacher of Children with Disabilities, which is divided by age ranges including a birth to school age 5 (B-5) and a kindergarten through grade 8 (K-8).

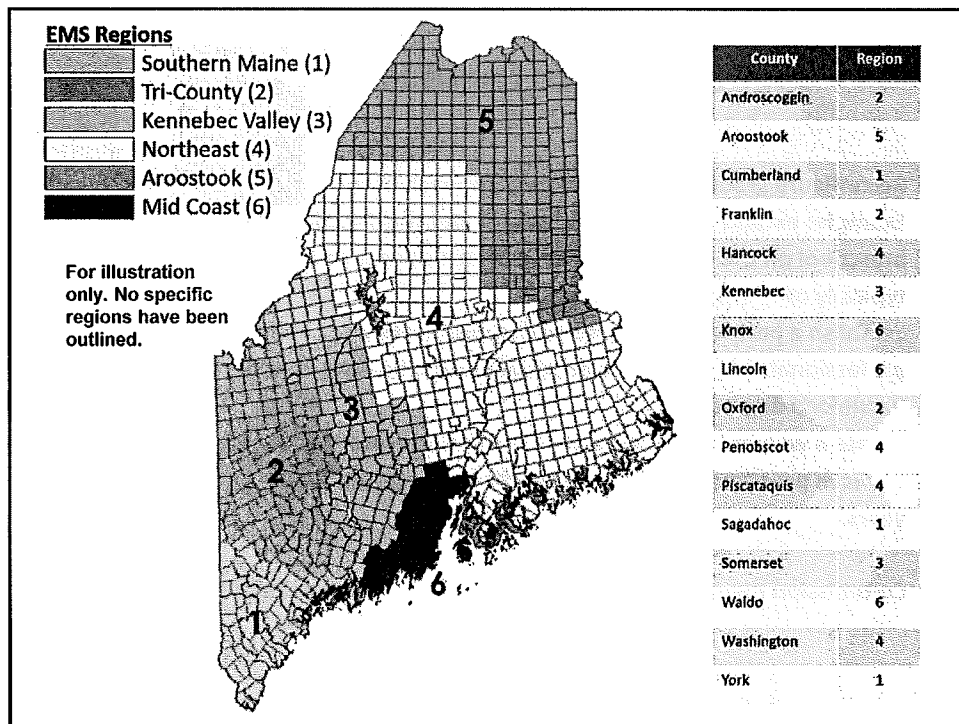
Suggestions to Increase Flexibility

- Reconfigure grade-level breakdowns for each of the certification endorsements
- Example: extend the 020 endorsement and the K-8 282 endorsement to include preschool on the basis that kindergarten students and preschool students are typically only a year apart in age
- Establish a pathway to an alternative certification for early childhood professionals (e.g. childcare provider staff) who have experience but not a Bachelor's degree
- Create a waiver for kindergarten-certified educators, granting them the ability to teach preschool if they have taught kindergarten for a specified number of years.

Commission members emphasized not reducing professional standards while exploring ways to increase flexibility

Key Points Recommendation #3

Facilitate coordination and outreach to increase public preschool partnerships through the use of a statewide coordinator and regional coordinators.



Key Points
Recommendation #4

Direct the Department of Health and Human Services, in collaboration with the Department of Education and stakeholders, to study the alignment of standards and rules for early childhood educators and providers to reduce barriers.

What's Possible?

- We need both partial day and full-day pre-K options for working parents.
- The creative partnerships and solutions to fix the child care challenges Mainers are experiencing exist. They are already working in many School Administrative Units.
- Maine can be a leader in how we approach child care statewide, using local solutions and a regional approach.
- Early childhood education is not only important, it is popular.



Questions?

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