

State of Maine
Department of Education

Testimony of Lee Anne Larsen, Director of Early Learning, Maine Department of Education

In Support of: L.D. 2114

An Act Regarding Public Preschool Programs Serving Children Who Are 3 Years of Age

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Sponsored by: Representative Murphy

Date: January 22, 2025

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

My name is Lee Anne Larsen, and I am here today representing the Department speaking in support of L.D. 2114, An Act Regarding Public Preschool Programs Serving Children Who Are 3 Years of Age. This bill expands the definition of public preschool to include a program that provides instruction to children who are 3 years old. In addition, the bill clarifies that State funding for 3-year-olds only applies to those identified for special education. The decision to include, and responsibility to fund, non-identified 3-year-olds in public preschool is entirely at the discretion of a local School Administrative Unit.

As responsibility for the provision of early childhood special education for children ages 3-5 transitions from Child Development Services to School Administrative Units (SAUs), it is necessary to ensure statute pertaining to the provision of public preschool includes allowance for SAUs to serve children 3 years of age. As SAUs plan for the provision of education for 3-year-olds with identified special education needs, they are exploring a range of options within the early childhood mixed-delivery system in their catchment areas, including but not limited to development of preschool programs inclusive of 3-year-olds identified and not identified for special education. Additionally, should opportunities to access grant funding to support SAUs with development of preschool programming that includes 3-year-olds become available, updates to statute addressed in this bill will make this allowable.

The Department of Education is in support of L.D. 2114, An Act Regarding Public Preschool Programs Serving Children Who Are 3 Years of Age. I am happy to answer any questions the Committee may have, and I will be available for work sessions on this bill.

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