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THE MAINE SENATE  
132nd Legislature

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**Testimony of Senate President Mattie Daughtry in support of  
LD 2064, "An Act to Expand Access to Early Childhood Nutrition by Establishing a Grant  
Program for Public Preschools."**

**Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs  
February 5, 2026**

Good afternoon, 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 honored to testify in favor of LD 2064, "An Act to Expand Access to Early Childhood Nutrition by Establishing a Grant Program for Public Preschools."

This summer and fall, we traveled across the state to learn what's working and what isn't in Maine's child care and early childhood education system. My team and I visited eleven early childhood programs across six counties, including multiple offsite public pre-k classrooms. In addition to those visits, nearly 200 parents and educators shared their experiences through our statewide survey and virtual listening sessions. While there was real optimism about recent legislative investments, we consistently heard that those investments are most effective when systems are allowed to work together seamlessly. When policy gaps remain, even our strongest programs can struggle to reach their full potential—particularly for our youngest learners who require the most support.

One of the issues we heard about across the state was that off-site public pre-k classrooms are not eligible for Maine's universal meals program. One center in my own district reported taking a \$15,000 annual loss to provide food to the public pre-k students. Public pre-kindergarten is one of the most important investments we can make in a child's future. Maine's expansion of public pre-k has opened doors for families and created new opportunities for early learning, social development, and school readiness. But for that promise to be fully realized, we must ensure that all children in pre-k classrooms have access to the same basic nutritional support as their peers.

Access to nutritious food is foundational to brain development and to learning. Young children cannot focus, regulate their emotions, or fully engage in the classroom when they are hungry. Feeding children is not an optional add-on to early education—it is a core part of helping them grow, learn, and thrive. When we invest in early childhood nutrition, we are supporting not only individual children, but the long-term success of our education system as a whole.

As we developed this legislation, I worked closely with early educators, advocates, and members of this committee to balance what we heard on the tour with what would be most immediately helpful and administratively workable for providers. LD 2064 establishes a grant program through

which school administrative units and childcare providers can work together to decide how best to get food into these classrooms. The methods are up to the SAU and childcare provider to determine how best to get the food, be it the SAU directing funds to the provider and them handling the rest, or the SAU doing the cooking and delivering meals each day to the providers.

Ensuring that our youngest Mainers are fed is one of the most important and impactful things we can do as legislators. I urge you to support LD 2064 to ensure that our pre-k kids get the best start to their schooling that they possibly can.

Thank you.