

Testimony 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
Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and Honorable Members of the Health and Human Services Committee**

2/5/2026

My name is Laura Larson, and I serve as Executive Director at a community-based early childhood education program in Brunswick, Maine, partnering with local school districts to deliver high-quality public pre-K. I am writing today in support of LD 2064: An Act to Expand Access to Early Childhood Nutrition by Establishing a Grant Program for Public Preschools and to underscore the importance of ensuring equitable access to free meals for all children enrolled in public preschool partnerships, regardless of the setting where they receive their preschool placement.

As you know, Maine's mixed-delivery preschool model allows children to receive high-quality early learning in both school-based and community-based settings. However, an important inequity remains; children placed in community partnership classrooms do not automatically receive the same free school meals they would receive if placed in a school-based preschool classroom.

This creates two significant challenges.

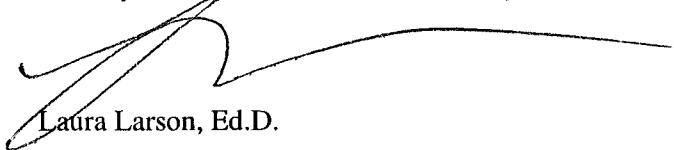
First, it places a financial and operational burden on community partner programs.

Even when a community program has a functioning kitchen, the program is responsible for purchasing food, staffing meal preparation, meeting licensing requirements, and covering all associated costs. These are costs the public school system would cover and be reimbursed for if the same child were placed in a school-based preschool classroom. As a result, partnership programs end up subsidizing a benefit the child would otherwise receive for free, simply because their preschool seat is at a community site.

Second, it creates an unintended burden on families.

Some partnership programs do not have licensed kitchens and therefore cannot prepare meals on-site. When these programs are not included in the school meal program, families must provide all meals from home, even though their child would receive a free meal if placed in a school-based classroom. For families experiencing food insecurity, this requirement can create significant hardship. A family's ability to access free school meals for their child should not depend on which building the public preschool classroom is located in. I would like to make sure that LD 2064 offers a practical and equitable solution by allowing school districts, when mutually agreed upon, to prepare meals for partnership programs. This ensures that all public preschool students receive the same meal benefits, regardless of location, and supports the sustainability of Maine's mixed-delivery system.

Thank you for your commitment to early childhood education,



Laura Larson, Ed.D.