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Maine Association for the
Education of Young Children

**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 Education and Cultural Affairs Committee

Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Heather Marden, and I am testifying today on behalf of the Maine Association for the Education of Young Children (MaineAEYC) in strong support of LD 2064.

MaineAEYC represents early childhood educators, program leaders, and advocates across the state who are committed to ensuring that all young children—regardless of zip code, age, or setting—have access to high-quality early learning experiences. LD 2064 is a critical step toward that goal by addressing a gap that many pre-K partnership sites experience every day: access to nutritious meals for young children.

Public pre-K partnerships are a cornerstone of Maine's mixed-delivery system, bringing together school districts and community-based early childhood programs to expand access for families. These partnerships allow children to learn in settings that are often closer to home and deeply connected to their communities. However, while these sites are delivering on educational standards and outcomes, many lack the resources to provide consistent, nutritious meals due to funding limitations or federal restrictions that prevent the sharing of school nutrition services.

For a four-year-old child, nutrition is not separate from learning—it is foundational to it. Hunger affects attention, behavior, and social-emotional development. When children do not have access to adequate meals during the school day, educators are left trying to teach while also managing unmet basic needs. This is not an issue of program quality or commitment; it is a structural gap that LD 2064 directly and thoughtfully addresses.

This bill also makes a broader and important policy statement. As a state, we must do better at looking at and providing policy for children from birth through age five as a whole system, rather than fragmenting supports by age, funding stream, or the physical space in which children are served. When public pre-K dollars are spent on children, that investment should not result in those same children having less access to essential resources simply because they are in a community-based setting rather than a school building.

By providing targeted grants to support nutrition at pre-K partnership sites, LD 2064 promotes equity across settings and reinforces the principle that public investments in children should result in comparable access to essential supports, regardless of the setting in which services are delivered. It recognizes community-based programs as essential partners in Maine's early learning system and ensures they have the tools needed to meet children's full, holistic needs.

This investment also supports working families and the early childhood workforce. Parents depend on stable, nurturing environments where their children are cared for comprehensively. Educators and program staff work every day to support children's growth and development, often filling gaps created by fragmented systems. Aligning supports across birth through five benefits not only children, but the adults who work hard in these critical roles.

LD 2064 takes an important step in making the case for a more aligned, equitable early childhood system in Maine. I hope we can pass this legislation and continue the work across this Committee and the Health and Human Services Committee to better align supports, value, and policy for all children from birth through age five.

On behalf of MaineAEYC and the early childhood community across the state, I urge you to vote **ought to pass** on LD 2064. Thank you for your time, your leadership, and your commitment to Maine's youngest learners.

Respectfully submitted,

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