



Testimony of Rita Furlow
Maine Children's Alliance
Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs
An Act to Update Department of Education Reporting Requirements
LD 2064
February 5, 2026

Good afternoon, Senator Rafferty and Representative Murphy, and esteemed members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Rita Furlow. I am the Senior Policy Analyst at the Maine Children's Alliance. I am providing testimony in support of LD 2064, *An Act to Expand Access to Early Childhood Nutrition by Establishing a Grant Program for Public Preschools*. The Maine Children's Alliance is a statewide non-partisan, non-profit research and advocacy organization whose mission is to promote sound public policies to improve the lives of children, youth, and families in Maine.

Preparing Maine for a prosperous future begins with our youngest residents. If we want strong communities and a resilient economy tomorrow, we must ensure that children have what they need today. During their preschool years, children undergo rapid brain growth and development. Adequate nutrition supports not only physical health but children's cognitive functioning, emotional regulation, and attention — all of which are essential for learning. We know that children who are hungry are less able to engage fully in classroom activities or build the cognitive and social-emotional skills needed for school success.

We believe that ensuring consistent access to nutritious meals in preschool is an essential component of school readiness.

As Maine expands public preschool, more classrooms will be delivered through partnerships with private, community-based early childhood programs located off site from public school buildings. These partnerships are essential to reaching more children across Maine and strengthening the early childhood system in our state.

As you have heard, because of complex federal regulations, children enrolled in public preschool can face unequal access to meals simply because their classroom is housed in a community-based setting rather than inside a school building.

LD 2064 helps correct this inequity by recognizing that preschool-age children should receive school meals regardless of program location. A child enrolled in public preschool should not lose access to breakfast, lunch, or snacks because their classroom is operated in partnership with an early childhood provider. The grant program proposed in this bill ensures that nutrition support follows the child, not the facility.

As you have heard, food insecurity remains a significant challenge for families with young children in Maine. Providing meals in preschool settings also helps reduce family costs while providing consistency in children's diets. By supporting meal service in both school-based and community-based public preschool classrooms, LD 2064 promotes access to early learning and nutrition across delivery models, ensuring that families are not penalized for choosing or being assigned to a particular program location.

We agree with testimony from the administration on behalf of the Children's Cabinet Early Childhood Advisory Council that supports this program but notes that the Advisory Council is not in a position to administer this program. We recommend that program administration reside with other school nutrition programs within the Department of Education.

LD 2064 aligns with best practices in early childhood policy by recognizing that nutrition and learning are inseparable and that as public preschool is delivered across multiple settings, children's access to meals should not depend on the location of the facility. By ensuring that all children attending public preschool — including those in community-based, off-site programs — can receive nutritious meals, this bill supports children's health and school readiness.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge the Committee to vote Ought to Pass on LD 2064.

Thank you for your consideration.