

132nd Legislature
Senate
of Maine
Senate District 32

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*Testimony of Senator Henry Ingwersen supporting
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
Thursday, February 5, 2026*

Good afternoon, Senator Rafferty, Representative Murphy, and the esteemed Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee. I am Senator Henry Ingwersen, and I proudly represent Senate District 32, which includes Arundel, Biddeford, Dayton, Hollis, and Lyman. Today, I offer testimony in strong support of President Daughtry's LD 2064, "An Act to Expand Access to Early Childhood Nutrition by Establishing a Grant Program for Public Preschools."

Last week, as the Senate chair of the Health and Human Services Committee, I was happy to work on two of my child care-related bills: LD 1728 and LD 2066.

The first bill, LD 1728, would put into Maine statute the federal child care subsidy rules that change the cap on co-payments for participants in the Child Care Affordability Program from 10% to 7%. It would allow the Health and Human Services Department to further reduce or waive these co-payments for families with a child with a disability, families experiencing homelessness and families with a foster child. The Department would have to post information related to co-payment amounts on its website. Finally, it would require the Department to issue subsidies based on enrollment, rather than attendance, encouraging more child care providers to participate in child subsidy programs without having to accept below-market rates for child care services.

The second bill, LD 2066, seeks to build on a successful two-year pilot program, which has demonstrated effective coordination with the Child Care Affordability Program. The bill would make the Child Care Employment Award a permanent component of Maine's child care subsidy system, along with the Child Care Affordability Program. As of September 2025, the program currently supports 511 Maine children from 313 working families. Without additional funding, 470 children from 312 families will remain on the waitlist.

While both of these bills invest in Maine's essential child care system and lower costs for working parents, they do not provide the full investment that our infants and toddlers deserve. President Daughtry's bill, LD 2064, recognizes that mixed delivery Pre-K is key for the survival

of the child care system as a whole. The lower ratio makes it profitable enough to uplift infant and toddler care.

It's also a direct response to persistent food insecurity in the state. Last fall, when the federal government shut down and withheld SNAP benefits, I spearheaded a letter to the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Brooke Rollins, which President Daughtry signed, urging the Secretary to tap into contingency funds and release SNAP benefits to the 170,000 Mainers – including children – who rely on this support.

At the same time, I met with community members at Youth Full Maine and the York County Food Pantry. I attended meetings with the Council of Mayors and the York County Food Council. But most importantly, during National School Lunch Week I served free school meals to students at Hollis School and Mildred L. Day School. While there, I spoke with District Nutrition Directors and nutrition staff, who assured me that the free school meal program is one of the most successful legislative efforts in recent state history. They report that more kids are eating school meals. This committee should feel proud that we were able to bring universal free school meals into law – and keep it there.

During the weeks of uncertainty surrounding SNAP, parents could breathe a little easier knowing their children would receive nutritious meals at school. Thinking back on that time now, it is clear to me that the state has to do more to take on food insecurity.

It's why I introduced LD 2004 this session. It seeks to open up the sources of funding of nutrition incentive programs, like Maine Harvest Bucks, so that the dollars are not dependent on federal match dollars. After all, if the federal dollars disappear, we cannot lose other sources of funding – allowing Mainers to go hungry.

With LD 2064, we can make a clear, strong commitment to feeding children when they are developing, growing, and learning. Aside from being the right thing to do, we cannot feed their minds unless we feed their bellies, too. And there are no do-overs: We either nurture children during these critical years or we miss the opportunity forever.

I thank the Committee for its time, and I urge all of you to vote Ought to Pass on LD 2064.



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