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Testimony of Casey Clark Kelley before
the Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs
in support of

**LD 1799: An Act to Expand Maine's High-quality Early Learning and Care for Children
by Increasing Public Preschool Opportunities in Communities**

May 10, 2023

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and honorable members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Casey Clark Kelley and I'm CEO of the Central Lincoln County YMCA. I support LD 1799: *An Act to Expand Maine's High-quality Early Learning and Care for Children by Increasing Public Preschool Opportunities in Communities*.

Collectively, the 15 YMCAs in Maine are the largest childcare provider in the state. We serve thousands of children in our early childhood education programs, before/afterschool programs, and summer camp. These programs provide children with safe, nurturing and enriching care, and are a critical component of our state's infrastructure to support working parents and our economy.

Unfortunately, the childcare system is under incredible strain. The Ys have extensive waitlists of families trying to access care for their children. This leaves parents to make incredibly hard decisions around placing their children in unlicensed care, cutting back their work hours, or leaving the workforce altogether. Despite our best efforts, the system is failing Maine families.

The childcare system needs public investment to meet the needs of Maine families. LD 1799 would expand access to publicly-funded pre-K that better aligns with the needs of working families by leveraging the existing network of childcare programs across Maine. This is an efficient use of resources that also helps minimize disruption of care for children.

Our YMCA serves approximately 50 children in the preschool and pre-K age groups with full-day care. Some of these children are with us as early as 6:30 in the morning and as late as 5:30 at night. While these are long days for kids, these are crucial hours for the parents who need to maintain their own work schedules. The Y is providing these early education programs to support working families and to provide a nurturing and stable educational environment for the children. It is important that the Y be included in this model to continue providing this care, and to increase access to full-time care for working parents. We serve 10 towns, and there are simply not enough full-day care options for families that need it. We all must work together to ensure that Maine families have access to safe and quality care so parents can work and children can thrive.

I urge you to vote ought to pass on LD 1799.

Respectfully submitted,

Casey Clark Kelley, CEO
Central Lincoln County YMCA

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