



MAINE

May 10, 2023

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

Dear Chairs Rafferty and Brennan, and Members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

I am writing in support of LD 1799, a bill proposing to help expand voluntary public PreK across Maine.

Some of you on these Committees will be familiar with my reasons, which other Mission: Readiness members have expressed at previous public hearings on the various public PreK proposal both in your committee and before the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee.

Mission: Readiness. Mission: Readiness is a national bi-partisan organization of more than 750 retired admirals and generals, 27 of whom are here in Maine, working to ensure that today's young people are prepared for successful lives with many career options, including serving our nation in or out of uniform.

I offer my comments as a Mission: Readiness member, and also as a private citizen, one with more than 36 years of service in the Army and Maine Army National Guard, commanding at the company, battalion, and brigade levels and finished my military career as the MeNG Director of the Joint Staff. I am an Iraqi Freedom Veteran and previously served as Director of Facilities and Engineering for the State of Maine and the Maine Army National Guard. In 2022 I was honored to be appointed Maine State Director of the Selective Service System. I am also a father and former middle school boys and girls coach, so I have a very personal stake in the education of our youngest Maine students.

As public policy makers, I would like you to see a connection that may not be readily apparent: why early education is so important not only for the young children who attend, but also for the future of our country.

During the summer of 2022, the U.S. Department of Defense shared preliminary details from its Qualified Military Available (QMA) study showing the ineligibility rate for 17- to 24-year-olds in our nation has climbed from the previously reported 71% to 77% nationwide. While we are

awaiting the release of the full QMA study that will provide additional details and state-level data, the initial results indicated that several factors contributing to the root causes of ineligibility have grown worse. The factors include lack of physical fitness, lack of educational attainment, and involvement in crime or substance abuse. It's also important to note that the study was completed in 2020, and therefore, does not capture the full impacts of the pandemic.

Often, when citizens think of our military the pictures that come to mind are the fast movers: the F-35 Lightning 2 fighter jets, battleships like the DDG 51 destroyers and future Navy platforms to be built at BIW in Bath, and the American M1A2 Abrams tanks, smart weapons, and other amazing state of the art technologies.

All of that is true – but our Armed Forces' **most important element is its people**. Make no mistake about it: the men and women of the military are dedicated and committed people, ones who are ready to defend our country and carry out their mission; and our military remains the strongest in the world. But when we recognize that 77% of young Americans cannot qualify for military service, I am concerned about our nation having the number of people and the quality of minds that we will need to secure our future. And I note: this is both in the military, as well as all other career fields.

The best way to address these disqualifiers is early intervention and support. As many on this Committee know, especially our teachers, the first five years of a person's life are fundamental to all of the success or failure that comes afterwards. This is the time when young children develop core pre-literacy and pre-math skills, and build the foundations for all later cognitive and social learning.

That is one critical reason why high-quality early learning programs are so important. Research shows that these programs can help create a stronger educational foundation, prevent obesity, and reduce behavioral issues.

These programs include high-quality public pre-K, child care and Head Start – all of which are great long-term strategies that will help young people in Maine succeed in school, so they can graduate and move forward to a productive career. I am pleased to read that LD 1799 encourages and support more partnerships among these early learning programs.

Research in multiple states shows the direct link between the quality of early education and later academic performances. Children who attend high-quality preschool are more likely to arrive at kindergarten ready to learn, with enhanced early math, language, and literacy skills. They are also less likely to be held back in school or to need special education, and more likely to be proficient in reading and math. Preschool participants also have an increased probability of graduating from high school.

By providing young children with pre-K opportunities for early learning, we can help them become successful students who are more likely to finish school and pursue the career path of their choice.

For those of us who have made a career in the military, it has been an outstanding experience that afforded us opportunities for learning self-discipline, building professional skills, and serving our country and communities. It would be a shame for the next generation not to have the same opportunities.

I urge the Education and Cultural Affairs Committees to support LD 1799 and expand high-quality Pre-K including mixed-delivery programs in interested communities throughout Maine.

Sincerely,

***Dwaine Drummond***

Dwaine Drummond

Brigadier General, U.S. Army (Retired)

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