

**TESTIMONY BY BEN GILMAN,
MEMBER, READYNATION**

**BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEES
ON EDUCATION AND 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**

Chairs Rafferty and Brennan, and distinguished members of the Committees, I am Ben Gilman, an attorney with Drummond Woodsum. Some of you may know me from my many years as General Counsel to the Maine State Chamber of Commerce. I also have the honor of serving as Chair of the Maine Children’s Trust, and am pleased to serve on the statewide entity overseeing home visiting programs and Senator Marianne Moore and Rep. Margaret Craven, as well as former Senator Joyce Maker.

I am also a member of ReadyNation, which brings business leader voices together to talk about and promote research-proven public policy initiatives focused on the earliest years of children’s lives.

Perhaps what qualifies me the most to speak to you today about public PreK is the fact that I’m a father to four amazing kids, ages 8, 11, 14 and 18. Through them, my wife and I have had a lot of experience with public education in Maine.

I am pleased to offer testimony in support of LD 1799, which seeks to continue to expand public PreK across Maine.

As members of this Committee know well, PreK has been part of Maine’s public education system for decades and is one of the fundamental building blocks in our state’s continuum of education.

Education is the single most important investment that can be made to ensure successful participation in the new, knowledge-based economy, earnings growth and improved socioeconomic status. Postsecondary education and training are critical to increasing productivity, income, and career advancement. High-quality early education and K-12 are essential building blocks to ensure postsecondary success. Moving each and every Mainer along the educational continuum to their highest educational potential is imperative. We all have seen the charts and know that there is a huge difference in lifetime earnings between a college graduate and someone who drops out of high school: \$1.6 million per drop out. These staggering earnings losses translate into less spending power, fewer contributions to the tax base, and lower productivity.

Education is a critical investment in Maine people and in our economy and must be treated as such, through a coordinated approach, with priorities and benchmarks from start to finish. Public PreK programs help students by laying the foundational education building blocks children need for later academic success and our public education system should include PreK to12.

Numerous studies have shown that children who participate in quality early learning programs have greater success and, for example:

- Are 44% more likely to graduate from high school;
- Are 74% more likely to hold a skilled job; and
- Make 36% more in earnings as adults.

These numbers translate into an unbeatable long-term rate of return – up to \$16 for every \$1 spent.

If Maine wants to build long-lasting economic security, we need to support our businesses today and ensure we have an infrastructure that will attract skilled workers and new businesses. One of the best ways to do that is to have quality early learning programs in place. Just as a quality K-12 system and great colleges and universities attract skilled workers and new businesses, so also does a quality early care and education system. It deserves an equal place at the education table in Maine.

I appreciate the opportunity to provide you all with our comments and urge the Committee to continue to support and expand voluntary public PreK in Maine.

Thank you.