



United Way
of Southern Maine

LIVE UNITED

Testimony 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 Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Ninette Irabaruta, and I am the Director of Public Policy and Advocacy at United Way of Southern Maine (UWSM). I am here today on behalf of all the United Ways in Maine to express our support for LD 1799, a bill that would expand publicly funded preschool to establish an equitable, mixed delivery system with the goal of creating universal access for preschool aged children and their families.

The data and research around access to high-quality preschool is clear: it is pivotal in shrinking existing proficiency gaps between low-income students and their peers from wealthier families; it boosts holistic school readiness in terms of academic, social, and emotional development; and it's proven to provide long-term, lasting outcomes realized through increased graduation rates.

The State of Maine has made incredible progress in increasing access to publicly funded preschool opportunities in partnership with school districts in the past few years. However, our hardworking families deserve to see a continued, concerted effort to bring a comprehensive mixed-delivery preschool system to fruition. This mixed-delivery methodology created in partnership with ECE providers and school districts is key; it would provide new opportunities for many low-income families that rely on extended hours of care, and it would support students with dynamic needs to ensure they're in a setting that best nurtures their growth.

This bill will set Maine on track to expand public preschool throughout the state by looking at partnerships between school districts and licensed childcare programs.

All United Ways in Maine support LD 1799 because Maine students and families deserve access to equitable preschool opportunities that fit into their lives, honor diverse student needs, and are intentional about holistically preparing our youngest learners for kindergarten. For these reasons, we respectfully encourage you to support and pass LD 1799 – a mechanism to thoughtfully improve our system of education for Maine's students, families, and communities.

Thank you for your leadership and service.