



**Testimony of Sue Powers
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**

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Sue Powers and I am an early childhood education and Whole Family Approach consultant with Maine Community Action Partnership. In my role, I work in partnership with the Maine Head Start Directors Association and Community Action Networks in Maine to improve the quality and conditions that support increased outcomes for social and economic mobility of Maine families, leading to their future success. I’m testifying 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.

In Maine, we have made steady progress on pre-k expansion over the past decade, now it is time to strengthen a mixed delivery system which will ensure parents are able to access a preschool setting that best meets the needs of their working family or child’s special considerations. Fifty percent of Maine 4-year-olds are enrolled in public pre-k programs. Twenty-one percent of Maine school districts do not offer pre-k and many of the current pre-k programs are 2.5 hours a day. This schedule makes it difficult for working families to participate. For children who move between child care and public pre-k, it results in many unnecessary transitions during a day. Extra transitions are difficult on young children and especially on children with different abilities. Ten hours of pre-k is not what families need or what supports children to be ready for K. Children need a full school day of pre-k to best support them to reach Maine Early Learning Development Standards (MELDS) and parents need extended day to better meet work schedules.

This bill would support mixed delivery pre-k and promote full day options for working families by funding pre-k enrollment in qualified child care programs. This support for community partnership pre-k would support children to receive their educational learning experience within one consistent setting, thus supporting social emotional development, relationship building and reducing potential behavioral challenges often created with unnecessary transitions.

Some Head Start programs have been operating in this model through public school collaboration for several years. Many of the partnerships developed for the purpose to meet working family’s needs and to avoid children moving from a full day Head Start model to a 10 hour a week model in public pre-k. Children benefit from consistent caregivers and fewer transitions. Children in full day high quality preschool settings arrive at kindergarten ready to learn with solid foundations in math and literacy.

This bill will also support an aligned professional development system for educators working across many early childhood settings. In addition, career pathways for educators will be expanded to allow for a professional career pathway.

Thank you for your time and your support for LD 1799. This legislation will support working parents to access pre-k in the setting that best meets the needs of their child and family and it will support high-quality child-care providers to be recognized as the amazing early educators that they are within the early care and education system in Maine.

Sincerely,

Sue Powers, MHSDA and MeCAP