



FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT®
FOR HEALTHY LIVING
FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Testimony of Meg Helming before
the Committee on Education & Cultural Affairs
in support of

**LD 2107: An Act Regarding Department Of Education Reliance On Criminal Background Checks
Required By The Department Of Health And Human Services**

January 24, 2024

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and honorable members of the Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Meg Helming and I'm the COO of the YMCA Alliance of Northern New England, which represents the 15 YMCAs in Maine. The Maine YMCAs support LD 2107: *An Act Regarding Department Of Education Reliance On Criminal Background Checks Required By The Department Of Health And Human Services*.

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/after school 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.

Background checks are a critical part of the hiring and certification process for childcare educators to protect the children in our care. However, there are myriad challenges and inefficiencies in the current system that exacerbate the staffing crisis in our programs and negatively impact continuity of care for Maine families. We therefore appreciate efforts to streamline the process without jeopardizing child safety. In particular, the change outlined in this bill would help ease a significant cost and administrative burden on childcare programs and educators that provide public pre-K. Currently, educators in this model must go through two separate background checks (DOE and DHHS), which costs time and money. The DHHS background check is more rigorous than the DOE check, and in fact includes all aspects of the DOE check. Therefore, requiring educators to go through both checks is entirely redundant and creates additional burdens on educators and the system with nothing gained.

The lack of available appointments for fingerprinting and wait times for results are a perpetual challenge across the childcare sector. We hope that by ending the duplicative requirement for educators to go through both checks in the scenario outlined above, the process will go more smoothly and quickly for those that actually need it.

We support this bill, and welcome further discussion on how we can address other challenges within the background check system and lack of alignment between DHHS and DOE.

I urge you to vote ought to pass on LD 2107.

Respectfully submitted,

Meg Helming
YMCA Alliance of Northern New England

Contact: Meg Helming, YMCA Alliance of Northern New England
P: 207.232.9896 **E:** meg.helming@nneymcas.org