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Maine Association for the
Education of Young Children

Testimony of Heather Marden

On behalf of the Maine Association for the Education of Young Children

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

1/24/2024

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, distinguished members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Heather Marden, Co-Executive Director of the Maine Association for the Education of Young Children (MaineAEYC).

MaineAEYC promotes high-quality early learning for each and every child, birth through age 8, by connecting practice, policy, and research. We advance a diverse, dynamic early childhood profession and support all who care for, educate, and work on behalf of young children.

We are supporting LD 2107 to help reduce barriers and redundancies that are experienced in the early childhood sector regarding fingerprinting and background checks.

Communities throughout Maine are seeking to offer and expand publicly funded pre-k opportunities for children and families. Fortunately, we are seeing some of these expansions of opportunities occurring in our local child care programs. These prek partnerships between schools and child care programs help strengthen and sustain child care programming by allowing for better wrap-around care for working families and providing choice.

Those who work in licensed child care programs have background checks that are required through the Department of Health and Human Services to meet federal requirements of the Child Care and Development Block Grant that Maine receives to carry out vital programming such as the Child Care Subsidy Program.

Those who work in public school settings and programs are required to have their background checks per the Department of Education requirements.

When educators are working under the two systems in pre-k partnerships, they are currently required to meet both systems background check requirements.

The DHHS background checks required through the Child Care and Development Block grant exceed the requirements of the Department of Education background checks which is where we see unnecessary redundancy and increased burden of cost and time to the educator having to adhere to both background check requirements.

This bill would allow the DOE to accept a persons background checks who are already in the system through DHHS.

With 25% of our public pre-k programming being done in partnership this would alleviate a burden for many teachers and programs.

Getting appointments with Identigo, which is the only agency teachers can go to in order to receive these checks can be a barrier alone. Staffing issues at these Identigo locations have created limited spaces in some areas of Maine. Educators have shown up to appointments only to find the building closed. In some of our more rural areas of Maine, their Identigo location can be over 2 hours away. A way to decrease some of this burden of having additional appointments is to reduce this background check redundancy in our systems. This way educators working between the systems under DOE and DHHS would only need to make one appointment and update one set of background checks every 5 years instead of two.

Currently, the background checks required under DHHS are paid for the educator through funds from the Child Care Development Block Grant. Once they have to do redo this background check for the DOE, they have to pay out of pocket \$55 for a check they have already gone through the process to do. So, this redundancy also places a financial burden on educators.

Please support LD 2107 and help reduce redundancy and burden for our hard-working educators who are helping bridge our vital systems of early care and education.