



Maine Head Start Directors Association

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Testimony of Cristina Salois On Behalf of the Maine Head Start Directors Association

Written Testimony to the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee

Regarding LD 2107, An Act Regarding Department of Education Reliance on Criminal Background Checks Required by the Department of Health and Human Services

January 18, 2024

Senator Rafferty, Representative Brennan, and members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee,

My name is Cristina Salois, and I am the Agency Director at Southern Kennebec Child Development Corporation (SKCDC) and Chair of the Maine Head Start Directors Association (MHSDA). MHSDA brings together the Directors of Maine's 11 Head Start programs and we provide Head Start services to vulnerable Maine children and their families across the state.

I submit this letter 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. I want to thank Sen. Stewart for bringing this proposal forward.

Summary: This bill requires that, when a criminal history background check of a person is required for the issuance or renewal of a teaching or educational personnel credential and that person was subject to a criminal history background check by the Department of Health and Human Services, the Commissioner of Education must rely on the criminal history background check information provided to the Department of Health and Human Services by the Maine Criminal Justice Information System and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

LD 4107 will support a background check system that builds efficiency and eliminates duplication of efforts between Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) and the Department of Education (DOE) while also ensuring the safety of children and the community. The bill asks the commissioner of DOE to accept DHHS fingerprinting and not require individuals to undergo a second background check/fingerprinting appointment. This unnecessary step bogs down an already stressed system and is creating workforce challenges.

Head Start program regularly partners with public schools in the provision of Public Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K). These partnerships have many benefits and support high quality early education and comprehensive services in public school settings.

Head Start programs in partnership must meet the requirements of both DOE Chapter 124 and Maine Childcare licensing rules. Background check requirements for DOE and DHHS lack alignment. This can also create misunderstandings and an unnecessary friction point in partnerships. Staff supporting these partnerships classrooms must have both background checks in place, creating an unnecessary burden on staff who in many cases already hold approved background checks in one of the systems. There also exists the possibility that a person may pass the DOE background check and not the DHHS background check, since this check has two additional steps required for successful approval.

Alignment among systems would support the development of public Pre-K partnerships, support the workforce, and eliminate duplication.

Thank you for your consideration and for your service to the citizens of Maine.