

LD 1001: An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations for the Expenditures of State Government, General Fund and Other Funds, and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2019, June 30, 2020 and June 30, 2021

Testimony in Support of Statewide Public Preschool Programs

March 11, 2019

Senator Breen, Representative Gattine, and distinguished members of the Appropriations and Financial Affairs Committee, and Senator Millett, Representative Kornfield, and distinguished members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs, my name is Ronald Jarrett, and I am the Director of Public Policy & Advocacy at United Way of Greater Portland (UWGP). I am here today, on behalf of UWGP, to testify in support of statewide public preschool programs.

Thrive2027 is our community's commitment to make Cumberland County stronger for everyone who calls it home. Spearheaded by UWGP, more than 225 business, non-profit, public, and community organizations have endorsed three 10-year goals that promise measurable and meaningful change in Greater Portland. These three goals are:

- Goal 1: More children have a strong start in school so that they are reading at grade level by the end of third grade. By 2027, we aim to have 70% of children reading at grade level by the end of third grade; currently, only 56% of Cumberland County children read proficiently at the end of third grade.
- Goal 2: More people have the education and employment opportunities they need to be able to live and work in Greater Portland. By 2027, we aim to have 70% of households paying less than 30% of their income on housing; currently, only 15% of low-income households in Cumberland County pay less than 30% of their income on housing.
- Goal 3: More of our neighbors live longer, healthier lives. By 2027, we are aiming for a 10% reduction in preventable premature deaths.

This bill helps to achieve all three goals.

In 2017, 57% of Maine's three and four year-olds were not in school.¹ Three and four year-olds who attend preschool gain between a half of a year to a full year of additional learning of language, literacy and math, which build cognitive and achievement outcomes for the student. Included in this growth is the social-emotional development of a child that occurs when attending preschool, including reducing children's behavioral aggression and increasing attentiveness in the classroom.² All of this helps put a child on the essential path to reading proficiently by the end of third grade, the important transition in a child's life when they pivot

¹ KIDS COUNT Data Center. <https://datacenter.kidscount.org/data/tables/9010-young-children-not-in-school?loc=1&loct=2#detailed/2/2-53/false/1652/any/17975,17976>

² "Investing in Our Future: The Evidence Base on Preschool Education," Foundation for Child Development, 2013. <https://www.fcd-us.org/assets/2016/04/Evidence-Base-on-Preschool-Education-FINAL.pdf> (page 4-5)

from learning to read to reading to learn. This point in time reflects perhaps the best indicator of a child's long-term academic success.

The societal benefits of public preschool are critical when achieving Goal 2. In 2016, 6,684 parents in Maine quit a job, did not take a job, or greatly changed their job because of problems with securing childcare during the previous year.³ A recent study from the Center for American Progress showed that in other states providing public preschool, maternal labor force participation increased by approximately 10% with the most significant gains among low-income mothers.⁴ The study goes on to state that, "...policies that support maternal labor force attachment could contribute to faster growth in gross domestic product (GDP); stronger financial security for young families, and fewer career sacrifices by women, who assume a disproportionate share of their families' care responsibilities."

As for Goal 3, children who get a strong start on their education, including social emotional learning, and are reading on grade level by 3rd grade are 4 times more likely to graduate from high school.⁵ In Cumberland County adults with less than a high school diploma or GED were 15% more likely to report poor health status.⁶

Increasing the number of seats available through increased funding will allow more 3 and 4 year-olds, and particularly those from low-income families, attend preschool and have a more equitable start to their school career. Opening more preschool seats allows parents to return to the workforce and helps the economy of the community. Allowing more children into public preschool programs—especially those from low-income families—will increase that child's chances of living a healthier and longer life.

For these reasons, we respectfully encourage you to support funding statewide public preschool programs.

Thank you for your leadership and service.

³ <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/news/2017/09/13/438838/2-million-parents-forced-make-career-sacrifices-due-problems-child-care/>

⁴ "The Effects of Universal Preschool in Washington DC," Center for American Progress, 2018. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2018/09/26/458208/effects-universal-preschool-washington-d-c/>

⁵ "Double Jeopardy, How Third Grade Reading Skills and Poverty Influence High School Graduation," Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2012. <http://www.aecf.org/resources/double-jeopardy/>

⁶ Maine Shared Community Health Needs Assessment. <https://www.maine.gov/dhhs/mecdc/phdata/MaineCHNA/>