

Testimony in Support of LD 468: An Act To Require That the State Fund on an Ongoing Basis a Minimum of 50 Percent of the Costs Associated with Public Preschool Programs and LD 1043: An Act To Establish Universal Public Preschool Programs

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 as provided in bills LD 468 and LD 1043.

Thrive2027 is our community's commitment to make Cumberland County stronger for everyone who calls it home. Powered by the community and led by United Way of Greater Portland, more than 230 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 to (1) give kids a strong start, (2) empower neighbors to thrive – not just survive, and (3) help us all live longer, better.

More specifically, 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.
- Goal 2: More people have the education and employment opportunities they need to be able to live and work in Greater Portland.
- Goal 3: More of our neighbors live longer, healthier lives.

Thrive2027 is not a new program – it is a new way of working. We have been convening players from across sectors, working to identify needs/gaps, and are in the early stages of aligning organizations and resources behind targeted solutions. LD 468 and LD 1043 will help 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 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 also 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

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)

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, 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 additional funding will allow more 3 and 4 year-olds, and particularly those from low-income families, to 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 their chances of living healthier and longer lives.

For these reasons, we respectfully encourage you to support LD 468 and LD 1043.

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/>