

Jonathan D. Moody
Superintendent of Schools

Mark P. Hatch
Assistant Superintendent

David A. Leavitt
Support Services Manager

**TESTIMONY BY JONATHAN MOODY
SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS RSU/MSAD 54
BEFORE THE JOINT STANDING COMMITTEE ON
HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES
IN SUPPORT OF LD 1712 AN ACT TO SUPPORT CHILDREN'S HEALTHY DEVELOPMENT AND
SCHOOL SUCCESS
THURSDAY, MAY 20, 2021, 3 P.M.**

Chairs Claxton and Meyer, distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, I am Jonathan Moody, Superintendent of Schools for RSU/MSAD 54 in Somerset County. I have the honor of serving as Superintendent in a large rural district that includes five elementary schools, the Skowhegan Area Middle School and Skowhegan Area High School, the Somerset Career and Technical Center, and the Marti Stevens Learning Center. We are also one of the community partners for Elevate Maine Skowhegan. My hope is that more school districts and communities across our state, especially in our rural communities, can experience the impact that Elevate Maine has had on our very youngest learners; and this is why I wholeheartedly support LR 1712, An Act to Support Children's Healthy Development and School Success.

I would like to focus my testimony on the power and promise of Elevate Maine, which is embraced in this bill as First 4 ME.

As many of you know, Maine is the most rural state in the nation, with 61 percent of our population living in a rural area based on the most recent U.S. Census data. We know that 23 percent of children in rural Maine live in poverty, which is 10 percentage points higher than children in urban communities. Rural children often lack resources and supports, including quality early childhood care and education. Somerset County specifically has incredibly limited high-quality childcare options for families. I'm told that more than a quarter of Maine's rural children live in these "child care deserts," which is defined as areas in which eligible young children outnumber available licensed child care slots by at least three-to-one.

I'm heartened to see our state leaders paying attention to these challenges. The Office of Child and Family Services has identified the lack of rural child care as a major problem and has made addressing it one of its top priorities. In my view, this bill will go a long way to address these challenges, and potentially create lasting changes that live on well beyond this legislative session.

The creation of regional community-based child care pilots in LD 1712 are based on our proven pilot model in Skowhegan and proposes to take this model into other regions of our state. The key provisions in this model include high-quality community-based early care and education partnerships; improved training for our early childhood workforce; creating an early childhood system with regional coordination and easy access for families; and improved data collection to monitor progress, analyze impact, and support continuous improvements.

Beginning in 2015 Educare Central Maine brought its best practices and model to our Skowhegan and Somerset County area, which, at that time, had the highest number of [child risk factors](#) in the state.

Elevate Maine Skowhegan began its work with funding from a federal Early Head Start-Child Care Partnership grant that has enabled child care centers and family child care providers in rural Somerset County to offer increased quality birth-to-kindergarten-entry early care and education, and thus have ensured that these children enter kindergarten healthy and ready to succeed. Providers receive a continuous loop of professional development through weekly visits that include coaching and mentoring, educational opportunities and networking with their peers. Providers also receive increased funding for resources and supplies. Parents receive ongoing education on parenting and child health and development, as well as family goal setting to support self-sufficiency.

The goals of Elevate Maine Skowhegan include: enhancing the quality of instruction, increasing family engagement and parent education to support child development, and providing comprehensive health services to the children (cognitive, nutritional, oral, mental and physical health).

[Elevate Maine/Somerset's evaluation](#) affirms that children, families and early educators all met program benchmarks. Outcomes data demonstrate success: Elevate Maine Skowhegan children showed increases in vocabulary and language, and in initiative and self-regulation, with enhanced attachment relationships and social and emotional well-being, and reduced negative behaviors. In addition, all of the Elevate Maine Skowhegan parents received health and parent education. Elevate Maine Skowhegan family child care providers improved the quality of their programs' physical space, materials and activities offered, and provider-child interactions, and thus advancing on Maine's Quality Rating Scale.

As the Superintendent of MSAD 54, I see firsthand the significant difference it makes when these children come to school well-prepared for learning, especially those kids who live in poverty. We see it primarily in the way they behave in the classroom, in the way they interact with new material. The practices and routines of school are essential for kids success in school, and early learning settings become a springboard for kids to move forward.

I believe Elevate Maine Skowhegan is a successful model for how this critically important early care and education work can be replicated across our state. I encourage your support for LD 1712's creation of additional high-quality pilot sites across Maine so more young children and their families and child care providers can benefit from this proven programming, and more of our youngest learns start off on their paths to success.



Jon Moody
Superintendent of Schools