



**TESTIMONY BY JASON JUDD  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, EDUCATE MAINE  
AND MEMBER, READYNATION  
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.**

Senator Claxton, Representative Meyer, distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, I am Jason Judd, Executive Director of Educate Maine and a member of the business organization ReadyNation. Educate Maine is proud to be a co-leader of the MaineSpark Coalition, which is dedicated to achieving Maine's education attainment goal that 60 percent of Maine adults have a credential of value by 2025.

One of the four tracks of MaineSpark is Strong Foundations. Strong Foundations envisions all of Maine's children starting off on the right foot, ensuring a stronger Maine for all of us down the road. MaineSpark's Strong Foundations track is focused on increasing good educational opportunities for Maine's youngest children—from birth to 6th grade—and for their families and caregivers. This includes increasing the number of high-quality early learning services and programs that offer support and guidance for families – like those proposed in LD 1712. We know high-quality early learning helps students succeed throughout our educational system.

I offer Educate Maine's continued support for high-quality early learning programs for the children who will be in these programs, and on behalf of my board members, I also am supporting LD 1712 as a tool to support Maine's current workforce.

As you are hearing from others today too, many working parents with young children must make a choice between spending a significant portion of their income on child care, finding cheaper but potentially lower-quality child care, or leaving the workforce altogether to care for their children. Whether because of limited availability, high costs, or program hours that don't work with parents' schedules, child care challenges are driving parents out of the workforce. We can't afford to continue to let this happen.

Parents who are unable to find reliable child care are significantly less likely to be employed than those who do. The scarcity of child care imposes challenges making it difficult for parents to stay in the workforce, which exacerbates our shortage of workers and damages families' economic security. Although these challenges affect all parents, mothers are also more often in low-wage jobs with nonstandard hours and inconsistent schedules.

Not surprisingly, child care is more of a challenge in rural Maine. Earlier this year, I was pleased to be part of the Council for a Strong America report release "[Early Childhood](#)

Programs' Scarcity Undermines Maine's Rural Communities<sup>1</sup> and video<sup>2</sup> highlighting the disproportionate challenges that rural children face in accessing high-quality early programs and other supports. That report and video are linked in my written testimony and I encourage you to review it as you deliberate on this bill. These children and families are counting on your support.

Educate Maine commends Governor Mills for recognizing this challenge and making addressing Maine's child-care crisis one of our 10-year economic goals. As you know, child care is also one of the top priorities from Maine's Economic Recovery Committee. Greater access to quality child care will promote family economic security and spur economic growth. That is why Educate Maine supports prioritizing quality child care, as envisioned in L.D. 1712, to expand high-quality early childhood programs in Maine.

I urge your unanimous support of this bill. I would be happy to answer any questions. Thank you.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.strongnation.org/articles/1424-early-childhood-programs-scarcity-undermines-maine-s-rural-communities>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fkbGVHhY9MQ&feature=youtu.be>