



Testimony of Jason Judd, Executive Director, Educate Maine and Member, ReadyNation

In Support Of

LD 258, “An Act Making Unified Appropriations and Allocations from the General Fund and Other Funds for the Expenditures of State Government and Changing Certain Provisions of the Law Necessary to the Proper Operations of State Government for the Fiscal Years Ending June 30, 2023, June 30, 2024 and June 30, 2025”

Tuesday, February 21, 2023

Senator Rotundo, Representative Sachs, members of the Committee on Appropriations and Financial Affairs, and Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, members of the Committee on Health and Human Services, I’m Jason Judd, Executive Director of Educate Maine. Our organization is focused on championing career readiness and increasing educational attainment, enabling all students to succeed in postsecondary education and in the workplace. We believe that a strong education system is essential to a strong economy here in Maine. We are a business-led organization with board and staff members from all across Maine. Educate Maine is also one of the founders of MaineSpark, the state attainment coalition focused on increasing the number of adults with degrees or credentials of value to 60% by 2025 to meet the needs of our economy.

Today I am here to support the proposed biennial budget, specifically the portion of the HHS budget that addresses wage supplements for our child care workforce. The Maine business community understands the critical need for high quality, accessible, and affordable child care. A few months ago, Educate Maine, the Maine Development Foundation, and the Maine State Chamber of Commerce released the most recent *Making Maine Work* report, which included a summary of the most pressing needs of Maine’s business community. The report highlighted the significant need to address workforce shortages for entry level workers, technical workers, and professional workers. Workforce needs were three of the top six items prioritized by business leaders for the next Governor to focus on. In order to address the workforce needs of our state, we need to make sure workers have access to reliable child care so they can participate in the workforce.

The biennial budget includes a variety of funding priorities to support early learning. At Educate Maine, our most significant policy priority to stabilize the early learning system is to invest in the early childhood workforce. We know that child care is the workforce behind all of the other workforces in Maine. We also know that early childhood educators are paid around \$14.50/hour and are part of the bottom 2% of wage earners in the country. As a result, these educators are leaving the field for higher paying jobs in other sectors. In a recent statewide survey, 57% of child care programs indicated that staffing shortages were a primary challenge. During the pandemic, child care educators received \$200/month in salary supplements in order to increase wages and reduce turnover in the child care industry. The funds included in the biennial budget to continue this program are essential to stabilizing the child care industry. The challenges with

low wages in child care have resulted in staffing issues and reductions in student enrollment rates, which have reduced access to child care for families. In order to have parents participate in the workforce, they must have reliable, affordable, and high quality child care for their children.

I urge you to continue to make investments in the child care workforce by supporting the increase in the allocation of the salary supplement for these educators of our youngest children. In addition to the child care workers' wage supplements in the Governor's budget, I encourage you to also support legislation this session that supports additional investment in the child care workforce. The success of our economy heavily relies on the child care workforce, and we must work together to ensure affordable, accessible, and appropriate child care for our youngest learners. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Jason Judd
Executive Director