

Testimony of Simon West for The Maine State Chamber of Commerce In Support  
of

L.D. 948 An Act to Create a Liaison Position Between the Department of  
Education and the Department of Health and Human Services on Early Childhood  
Education Matters

Chairs Rafferty and Brennan, and esteemed members of the Education and Cultural Affairs Committee, my name is Simon West. I reside in Gardiner and I represent the Maine State Chamber of Commerce, a statewide business association made up of both large and small businesses, here to provide you with my testimony in support of creating a liaison between the department of education and department of health and human services on early childhood education matters.

The Maine State Chamber supports this legislation in the spirit of business leaders' responses in the latest *Making Maine Work* report. The availability of Maine's workforce was referenced three separate times on business leaders' top ten concerns. A major strategy outlined in *Making Maine Work* for expanding Maine's workforce is to increase the workforce participation of our current population. Two action items feeding into this strategy is to engage working parents and new Mainers. We knew before the COVID-19 pandemic that childcare and early childhood education opportunities were on a razors edge for many parents. The childcare and early childhood education provider closures that still linger from the pandemic have forced many parents to have work disruptions or leave the workforce entirely. Through out the pandemic, and even now, Maine's population has grown due to net in migration. This in-migration is important to continued growth as our population growth is not keeping up with workforce needs organically. Not all who have moved here in the last three years have stayed. Many who have left did so because of uncertainty surrounding the availability of childcare and early childhood education.

While this position may not solve all the workforce challenges parents and employers face due to constraints around childcare and early education, it is a step in the right direction. The department of education and the department of health and human services each play a critical role in supporting our youngest and often most vulnerable citizens. The departments are also specialists. Their work often leads them to hold different specific concerns for the same individual or area. This specialization, while effective in solving specific problems, often results in siloed approaches in any type of organization. The addition of a liaison will likely break down this silo, allow for cross functional work, and ensure that an adequate flow of communication is occurring between the two departments. I ask that you give LD948 your support as a resource to help the departments meet their mission.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with our testimony.