

Testimony of Dr. Pamela Thompson
In support of

***LD 1726: An Act to Build Maine's Economy by Supporting Child Care for Working Families
May 10th, 2023***

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Appropriations and Health and Human Services Committees. I am Dr. Pamela Thompson, from Waterville. I am a College Admin and Early Childhood Professor.

As a professional in the field of preparing teachers, I have seen first hand the challenges that individuals who want to pursue their goal of becoming caring and highly qualified early child professionals. The fact is that the field is chronically underpaid, commensurate with the responsibility and value added that a high quality child care and education family care and or center provides a community.

Oftentimes child care and educational professionals are forced in strictly financial terms to never enter the field or to take a 2nd job, often which pays more than their early childhood position. A quote from a former student: "You can make more money tending bar than caring for children." Second point: We can not have it both ways, expect well prepared early childhood professionals, often who may have 2 and 4 year college degrees in the field of early childhood education to enter the field, and then ask them to make less than many post pandemic retail, restaurant, or related service industry jobs, It does not align with the skill set and preparation they have received and this includes the many professionals in the field who may not have college degrees but who have many credentials, trainings, and/ or other learning experiences.

There is a real concern for the growing child care desert in the state of Maine. We can not pretend that we will grow stronger as a state economy without the consistent and meaningful support of its early childhood workforce. We have research that supports that early childhood years birth to 5 are key to a child's brain development. This is not new information, however, it is important we recognize that in partnership with parents/families, early childhood care and education professionals are shaping those developing brains. These early learning years shape the cognitive and social growth of a child; we would not consider paying a pediatrician \$10 an hour to care for a child's physical health, why do we think that paying a professional that amount is okay for a child's emerging cognitive and social growth. This is often the very foundation of early childhood programs.

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony and I strongly urge you to support over \$12 million in funding within LD 1726 dedicated to improving wages of early childhood educators in child care programs.