

Testimony of Jolene Blake
In support of
***LD 1726: An Act to Build Maine's Economy by Supporting Child Care for Working Families
sponsored by Senate President Troy Jackson***

Senator Baldacci, Representative Meyer, and distinguished members of the Health and Human Services Committee, my name is Jolene Blake. I am a Center Director, and I live in Mapleton. I'm testifying in support of LD 1726 An Act to Build Maine's Economy by Supporting Child Care and Working Families.

I support raising child care educator wages because people who care for children day in and day out are more than teachers, they do way more than lesson planning. These staff make sure their spaces and classrooms are clean, they care for children when they are ill. Childcare is a profession of many hats. You have to be a teacher, doctor, nurse, accountant, friend, chef, lunch lady, janitor, nap monitor, bathroom monitor, toilet trainer, diaper changer, yoga/ dance/ music instructor, playground traffic controller, problem solver, noise controller, librarian, peacemaker, friend, therapist, story teller, dishwasher, protector and activity director. That is just a few of the many hats we wear as childcare providers.

I support Maine developing a cost model tool that better supports our understanding of what it costs to provide quality care and education because if as owners we could pay our staff more comparable wages like close to teachers salary we wouldn't have the staff turnover and would have more people willing to go into the field of childcare and stay there. Currently people who are young go into childcare with big plans and dreams and realize that it is not a livable wage for the most part.

I support raising subsidy eligibility for Maine's lower income families because people can not get a job without having childcare. Its that simple. They can't attend classes, go to work, or even think about working full time if they don't have care. If more people qualified for subsidy care that would be more people in the workforce daily who would be contributing to our society as a whole.

I support ensuring that subsidy reimbursement covers days when children are absent from their program because a childcare provider does not generally charge a day rate, their rates are based on a weekly and monthly budget. Food costs have soared as well as all other day to day costs such as electric and heat. When a provider gives the parents a rate its for the full week of care based on all the meals, snacks, and activities that are provided whether a child attends or not. The provider has to be prepared to have everyone on the roster attend everyday so they are fully stocked. The provider does all their shopping weekly when its convenient for them and they take the time to plan for those meals, snacks, and activities

I support Maine developing a long term plan to increase investments in child care programs while also increasing subsidy eligibility because the benefits to childcare programs will be less staff turnover and more quality care programs able to sustain the childcare field

I support providing funding to pay for child care for child care employees because childcare employees are paid way less than other professions but they themselves still have to pay a rate to keep their child in care. Some childcare owners give discounted rates but that child is taking up a slot in care and the owner needs to be able to make the budget balance weekly and monthly.

Please vote in support of LD 1726,
Jolene Blake