

Lori Baugh-Castellano
Lisbon
LD 1544

Senator Grohoski, Representative Perry, and honorable members of the Joint Standing Committee on Taxation: my name is Lori Baugh-Castellano, I am a resident of Lisbon, and I offer this testimony in favor of LD 1544.

Expanding Maine's dependent care tax credit is important for us because it will be a direct investment in the lives of kids who could really use that investment.

My wife and I became foster parents because we cared about kids. There's such a huge need for foster parents; it's amazing how many emails we get every week highlighting kids who need care. We've had as many as five kids at one time. Our hearts get broken when they leave, but while they're with us we try to help them experience things they haven't experienced before. We take them to museums, to summer camp, to Funtown Splashtown.

Let me tell you specifically about one of the kids we foster. Previously she and her sister had missed a lot of school. We're trying to show her that working hard in school and being involved can earn scholarships for college. She had never done sports before, and now she's in all kinds of sports—her cheer team won the state championship this year, and now she's doing a travel team for field hockey. She's taking honors classes and has made the honor roll. She was invited to take part in the Olympia Snowe Women's Leadership Institute--it's a high honor for her to do that, and it's something she wouldn't have experienced before. I think she understands that we're willing to do what's necessary for her. She knows she can count on us, emotionally and financially.

And while we love this girl unconditionally and would do anything for her, there is a financial cost. One field hockey camp alone cost \$400, and there's always new equipment to buy. When we first became foster parents, my wife and I were both working full time and trying to do it all. I had a good job, but combining that with fostering so many kids with various needs was exhausting. Now I'm the stay-at-home parent and I'm putting the kids first. We're fostering an infant right now in addition to parenting a high-energy preschooler and chauffeuring a high-schooler everywhere. And It's the best job I've ever done.

But what we make as foster parents doesn't cover all expenses, so any additional amount of money helps. It's not just one kid; it's however many kids we have in our care at one time. They all have needs, and we want to do the best we can for them. I urge you to invest in Maine's children by passing LD 1544.