

Testimony of Sara Perrigo
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 Sara Perrigo. I am a Child Care Center Co-Director, and I live in Scarborough. 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 children's brains are developing at the most rapid rate of their lives during their first 5 years of development. The educators who work with this age group need to be well educated, caring, and intentional in every single detail of their work. This requires proper education and training through higher education. We are seeing a continuing decline to enrollment in ECE degree programs because college students will not be able to graduate and make a living wage, let alone pay back college loans. Investing money in our youngest learners to have highly qualified teachers is only a win for the state of Maine. I can't imagine an investment with a better return now and in the long term.

I support Maine developing a cost model tool that better supports our understanding of what it costs to provide quality care and education because Child Care has incredibly thin margins of profit. Family tuition drives the funding and the cost of care. For infants who are typically at a 4 to 1 (child-teacher) ratio or toddlers who are typically at a 5 to 1 ratio, the cost of care is much higher and most families would not be able to afford their weekly rates to actually cover the cost. This means centers who enroll infants and toddlers are actually losing money on those particular enrollment spots. This leaves the preschool families to make up the difference. Preschool classroom can run up to a 10 to 1 ratio, but don't see much of a decrease in their weekly cost for his reason. This makes budgets incredibly tight.

I support raising subsidy eligibility for Maine's lower income families because the cost of living has skyrocketed and more Maine families are struggling to make ends meet. In order to pay ECE educators what they deserve and to attract more qualified (or any) new applicants their pay needs to increase a fair amount. The way the system is currently designed this increase will just fall on families. This is a vicious cycle where everyone is losing. Families, Child Care centers and home providers, employers, employees, the Maine economy are all losing, but most concerning is that the Children are directly losing.

I support ensuring that subsidy reimbursement covers days when children are absent from their program because Child Care is a business that has bills and a workforce to pay regardless of attendance. If you are reserving a spot for anything, you pay whether you use it or not because there needs to be predictable income and no one else is paying if you don't show up.

I support Maine developing a long term plan to increase investments in child care programs while also increasing subsidy eligibility because you can't adequately solve one of these problems without solving the others. Both child care programs and families need support to get us to a better functioning, higher quality, sustainable model that can meet enrollment demands.

I support shortened time periods for determining subsidy eligibility and for child care programs receiving subsidy reimbursement because this is a crisis situation and it hasn't been given the attention it deserves even prior to the Covid pandemic, so now we are running out of time.

Please vote in support of LD 1726,
Sara Perrigo