

Testimony of Cierra Astor
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 Cierra Astor. I am a parent and a financial services representative, and I live in Bath. 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 underpaid wages for childcare educators are one of the top reasons why there is no availability for childcare. There are no openings because workers are underpaid and can work at a retail or grocery store and make more money.

I support Maine developing a cost model tool that better supports our understanding of what it costs to provide quality care and education because how do you know what it truly cost to provide quality care in today's world? Everything has increased. Gas, food, shelter. The basic necessities we need to live. Allow the future generation to not only survive but to thrive.

I support raising subsidy eligibility for Maine's lower income families because until you have been affected by the subsidy guidelines you don't understand how truly difficult it is to raise a family. My family lost our subsidy because we were 200 dollars a month over income. I got my annual raise and just like that zero assistance. Raise the subsidy. It helps children get the care they need and parents can work to get out of the lower income.

I support ensuring that subsidy reimbursement covers days when children are absent from their program because ratios are designed to protect the children. If one child is sick and doesn't go to daycare the childcare worker still shows up. By not reimbursing the absent days parents are going to want to send their sick children in to make sure their subsidy isn't taken away. Why should kids be punished for being sick.

I support Maine developing a long term plan to increase investments in child care programs while also increasing subsidy eligibility because isn't investing literally to put money into things for the future that matter? This is probably the only thing that matters. Invest in the next generations education. They will lead our country someday. And I hope it's better than things are now.

I support increasing Head Start eligibility and funding because Head start is insanely important it's that first crucial step to education. Children build basic communication, emotional. Empathy, compassion. If it weren't for head start and early childhood education programs my child would not be speaking today. At 4 years old he was extremely behind in his language. I needed assistance to pay for his speech therapy. As a single mom I made it work. With no help from the other parent, I might add. The state needs to do better at making sure the custodial parent gets help. We didn't ask to do this alone!

I support for my childcare employees to be paid what they are worth. They are teaching our children. The next generation that will face many challenges in their lives as we do now. We need them to show up and care, and be compensated for the impossible job that they do every day.

I support shortened time periods for determining subsidy eligibility because Maine is one of the hardest states to get assistance in. Why does it takes WEEKS for you to process an application that way emailed. We need childcare now! Implement a temporary coverage if nothing else to provide a smoother transition for families. Most of us will lose our job before getting approved.

I support shortened time periods for child care programs receiving subsidy reimbursement because it is so obvious to me. But in case it isn't to all of legislation when you pay for an item you want it now. You have that right. Don't ask our childcare programs to front the cost. It's ridiculous and cruel to watch them struggle. Inmates are simply treated with more respect than our youth.

Please vote in support of LD 1726,
Cierra Astor